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ROBERT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS

v.14

PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

WITH OTHER POEMS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
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PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

ET CETERA

PROLOGUE.

I.

O the old wall here! How I could pass
  Life in a long Midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
  My eyes from a wall not once away!

II.

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
  Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loth,
  In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

III.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
  Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body,—the house, no eye can probe,—
  Divined as, beneath a robe, the limbs?

IV.

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang perhaps:
So, the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

V.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart.
I—prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start—

VI.

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That 's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and—forth to thee!

OF PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER.

1876

I.

QUERY: was ever a quainter
Crotchet than this of the painter
Giacomo Pacchiarotto
Who took "Reform" for his motto?

II.

He, pupil of old Fungaio,
Is always confounded (heigho!)
With Pacchia, contemporaneous
No question, but how extraneous
In the grace of soul, the power
Of hand,—undoubted dower
Of Pacchia who decked (as *we* know,
My Kirkup!) San Bernardino,

Turning the small dark Oratory
To Siena's Art-laboratory,
As he made its straitness roomy
And glorified its gloomy,
With Bazzi and Beccafumi.
(Another heigho for Bazzi:
How people miscall him Razzi!)

III.

This Painter was of opinion
Our earth should be his dominion
Whose Art could correct to pattern
What Nature had slurred—the slattern!
And since, beneath the heavens,
Things lay now at sixes and sevens,
Or, as he said, *sopra-sotto*—
Thought the painter Pacchiarotto
Things wanted reforming, therefore.
"Wanted it"—ay, but wherefore?
When earth held one so ready
As he to step forth, stand steady
In the middle of God's creation
And prove to demonstration
What the dark is, what the light is,
What the wrong is, what the right is,

What the ugly, what the beautiful,
What the restive, what the dutiful,
In Mankind profuse around him?
Man, devil as now he found him,
Would presently soar up angel
At the summons of such evangel,
And owe—what would Man *not* owe
To the painter Pacchiarotto?
Ay, look to thy laurels, Giotto!

IV

But Man, he perceived, was stubborn,
Grew regular brute, once cub born;
And it struck him as expedient—
Ere he tried to make obedient
The wolf, fox, bear and monkey,
By piping advice in one key—
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not Man-fossil—
Not fact, in short, but fancy.
By a laudable necromancy
He would conjure up ghosts—a circle
Deprived of the means to work ill

Should his music prove distasteful
And pearls to the swine go wasteful.
To be rent of swine—that *was* hard!
With fancy he ran no hazard:
Fact might knock him o'er the mazzard.

V

So, the painter Pacchiarotto
Constructed himself a grotto
In the quarter of Stalloreggi—
As authors of note allege ye.
And on each of the whitewashed sides of it
He painted—(none far and wide so fit
As he to perform in fresco)—
He painted nor cried *quiesco*
Till he peopled its every square foot
With Man—from the Beggar barefoot
To the Noble in cap and feather:
All sorts and conditions together.
The Soldier in breastplate and helmet
Stood frowningly—hail fellow well met—
By the Priest armed with bell, book and candle.
Nor did he omit to handle
The Fair Sex, our brave distemperer:
Not merely King, Clown, Pope, Emperor—
He diversified too his Hades

Of all forms, pinched Labour and paid Ease,
With as mixed an assemblage of Ladies.

VI.

Which work done, dry,—he rested him,
Cleaned pallet, washed brush, divested him
Of the apron that suits *frescanti*,
And, bonnet on ear stuck jaunty,
This hand upon hip well planted,
That, free to wave as it wanted,
He addressed in a choice oration
His folk of each name and nation,
Taught its duty to every station.
The Pope was declared an arrant
Impostor at once, I warrant.
The Emperor—truth might tax him
With ignorance of the maxim
"Shear sheep but nowise flay them!"
And the Vulgar that obey them,
The Ruled, well-matched with the Ruling,
They failed not of wholesome schooling
On their knavery and their fooling.
As for Art—where's decorum? Pooh-poohed it is
By Poets that plague us with lewd ditties,
And Painters that pester with nudities!

VII.

Now, your rater and debater
Is baulked by a mere spectator
Who simply stares and listens
Tongue tied, while eye nor glistens
Nor brow grows hot and twitchy,
Nor mouth, for a combat itchy,
Quivers with some convincing
Reply—that sets him wincing?
Nay, rather—reply that furnishes
Your debater with just what burnishes
The crest of him, all one triumph,
As you see him rise, hear him cry "Humph!
Convinced am I? This confutes me?
Receive the rejoinder that suits me!
Confutation of vassal for prince meet—
Wherein all the powers that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mincemeat!"

VIII.

So, off from his head flies the bonnet,
His hip loses hand planted on it,
While t' other hand, frequent in gesture,
Slinks modestly back beneath vesture,
As,—hop, skip and jump,—he 's along with

Those weak ones he late proved so strong with!
Pope, Emperor, lo, he 's beside them,
Friendly now, who late could not abide them,
King, Clown, Soldier, Priest, Noble, Burgess;
And his voice, that out-roared Boanerges,
How minikin-mildly it urges
In accents how gentled and gingered
Its word in defence of the injured!
"O call him not culprit, this Pontiff!
Be hard on this Kaiser ye won't it
Ye take into con-si-der-ation
What dangers attend elevation!
The Priest—who expects him to descant
On duty with more zeal and less cant?
He preaches but rubbish he 's reared in.
The Soldier, grown deaf (by the mere din
Of battle) to mercy, learned tippiing
And what not of vice while a stripling.
The Lawyer—his lies are conventional.
And as for the Poor Sort—why mention all
Obstructions that leave barred and bolted
Access to the brains of each dolt-head?"

IX.

He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
Precedence to males in the alphabet!

Still, disposed of Man's A, B, C, there 's X,
Y, Z, want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
How much may be said in excuse of
Those vanities—males see no use of—
From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
What 's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
How kind can they be to their dumb pets!
Of their charms—how are most frank, how few venal!
While as for those charges of Juvenal—
Quæ nemo dixisset in toto
Nisi (*ædepol*) *ore illoto*—
He dismissed every charge with an "*Apage!*"

X.

Then, cocking (in Scotch phrase) his cap a-gee,
Right hand disengaged from the doublet
—Like landlord, in house he had sub-let
Resuming of guardianship gestion,
To call tenants' conduct in question—
Hop, skip, jump, to inside from outside
Of chamber, he lords, ladies, louts eyed
With such transformation of visage
As fitted the censor of this age.
No longer an advocate tepid
Of frailty, but champion intrepid

Of strength, not of falsehood but verity,
He, one after one, with asperity
Stripped bare all the cant-clothed abuses,
Disposed of sophistic excuses,
Forced folly each shift to abandon,
And left vice with no leg to stand on.
So crushing the force he exerted,
That Man at his foot lay converted!

XI.

True—Man bred of paint-pot and mortar!
But why suppose folks of this sort are
More likely to hear and be tractable
Than folks all alive and, in fact, able
To testify promptly by action
Their ardour, and make satisfaction
For misdeeds *non verbis sed factis?*
"With folk all alive be my practice
Henceforward! O mortar, paint-pot O,
Farewell to ye!" cried Pacchiarotto,
"Let only occasion intérpose!"

XII.

It did so: for, pat to the purpose
Through causes I need not examine,

There fell upon Siena a famine.
In vain did the magistrates busily
Seek succour, fetch grain out of Sicily,
Nay, throw mill and bakehouse wide open—
Such misery followed as no pen
Of mine shall depict ye. Faint, fainter
Waxed hope of relief: so, our painter,
Emboldened by triumph of recency,
How could he do other with decency
Than rush in this strait to the rescue,
Play schoolmaster, point as with fescue
To each and all slips in Man's spelling
The law of the land?—slips now telling
With monstrous effect on the city,
Whose magistrates moved him to pity
As, bound to read law to the letter,
They minded their hornbook no better.

XIII.

I ought to have told you, at starting,
How certain, who itched to be carting
Abuses away clean and thorough
From Siena, both province and borough,
Had formed themselves into a company
Whose swallow could bolt in a lump any

Obstruction of scruple, provoking
The nicer throat's coughing and choking:
Fit Club, by as fit a name dignified
Of "Freed Ones"—"*Bardotti*"—which signified
"Spare-Horses" that walk by the waggon
The team has to drudge for and drag on.
This notable club Pacchiarotto
Had joined long since, paid scot and lot to,
As free and accepted "Bardotto."
The Bailiwick watched with no quiet eye
The outrage thus done to society,
And noted the advent especially
Of Pachiarotto their fresh ally.

XIV.

These Spare-Horses forthwith assembled:
Neighed words whereat citizens trembled
As oft as the chiefs, in the Square by
The Duomo, proposed a way whereby
The city were cured of disaster.
"Just substitute servant for master,
Make Poverty Wealth and Wealth Poverty,
Unloose Man from overt and covert tie,
And straight out of social confusion
True Order would spring!" Brave illusion—
Aims heavenly attained by means earthy!

XV.

Off to these at full speed rushed our worthy,—
Brain practised and tongue no less tutored,
In argument's armour accoutred,—
Sprang forth, mounted rostrum and essayed
Proposals like those to which "Yes" said
So glibly each personage painted
O' the wall-side wherewith you 're acquainted.
He harangued on the faults of the Bailiwick:
"Red soon were our State-candle's paly wick,
If wealth would become but interfluous,
Fill voids up with just the superfluous;
If ignorance gave way to knowledge
—Not pedantry picked up at college
From Doctors, Professors *et cætera*—
(*They* say: '*kai ta loipa*'—like better a
Long Greek string of *kappas*, *taus*, *lambdas*,
Tacked on to the tail of each damned ass)—
No knowledge we want of this quality,
But knowledge indeed—practicality
Through insight's fine universality!
If you shout '*Bailiffs, out on ye all! Fie,*
Thou Chief of our forces, Amalfi,
Who shieldest the rogue and the clotpoll!'
If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole

I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's
Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas—"
(Whoever to scan this is ill able
Forgets the town's name 's a dissyllable)
"If, this done, ye did—as ye might—place
For once the right man in the right place,
If you listened to me . . ."

XVI.

At which last "If"
There flew at his throat like a mastiff
One Spare-Horse—another and another!
Such outbreak of tumult and pother,
Horse-faces a-laughing and fleering,
Horse-voices a-mocking and jeering,
Horse-hands raised to collar the caitiff
Whose impudence ventured the late "If"—
That, had not fear sent Pacchiarotto
Off tramping, as fast as could trot toe,
Away from the scene of discomfiture—
Had he stood there stock-still in a dumb fit—sure
Am I he had paid in his person
Till his mother might fail to know her son,
Though she gazed on him never so wistful,
In the figure so tattered and tristful.

Each mouth full of curses, each fist full
Of cuffings—behold, Pacchiarotto,
The pass which thy project has got to,
Of trusting, nigh ashes still hot—tow!
(The paraphrase—which I much need—is
From Horace "*per ignes incedis.*")

XVII.

Right and left did he dash helter-skelter
In agonized search of a shelter.
No purlieu so blocked and no alley
So blind as allowed him to rally
His spirits and see—nothing hampered
His steps if he trudged and not scampered
Up here and down there in a city
That 's all ups and downs, more the pity
For folk who would outrun the constable.
At last he stopped short at the one stable
And sure place of refuge that 's offered
Humanity. Lately was coffered
A corpse in its sepulchre, situate
By St. John's Observance. "Habituate
Thyself to the strangest of bedfellows,
And, kicked by the live, kiss the dead fellows!"
So Misery counselled the craven.

At once he crept safely to haven
Through a hole left unbricked in the structure.
Ay, Misery, in have you tucked your
Poor client and left him conterminous
With—pah !—the thing fetid and verminous !
(I gladly would spare you the detail,
But History writes what I retail.)

XVIII.

Two days did he groan in his domicile :
"Good Saints, set me free and I promise I 'll
Abjure all ambition of preaching
Change, whether to minds touched by teaching
—The smooth folk of fancy, mere figments
Created by plaster and pigments,—
Or to minds that receive with such rudeness
Dissuasion from pride, greed and lewdness,
—The rough folk of fact, life's true specimens
Of mind—'*haud in posse sed esse mens*'
As it was, is, and shall be for ever
Despite of my utmost endeavour.
O live foes I thought to illumine,
Henceforth lie untroubled your gloom in !
I need my own light, every spark, as
I couch with this sole friend—a carcase !"

XIX.

Two days thus he maundered and rambled;
Then, starved back to sanity, scrambled
From out his receptacle loathsome.
"A spectre!"—declared upon oath some
Who saw him emerge and (appalling
To mention) his garments a-crawling
With plagues far beyond the Egyptian.
He gained, in a state past description
A convent of monks, the Observancy.

XX.

Thus far is a fact: I reserve fancy
For Fancy's more proper employment:
And now she waves wing with enjoyment,
To tell ye how preached the Superior
When somewhat our painter's exterior
Was sweetened. He needed (no mincing
The matter) much soaking and rincing,
Nay, rubbing with drugs odoriferous,
Till, rid of his garments pestiferous
And robed by the help of the Brotherhood
In odds and ends,—this gown and t' other hood,—
His empty inside first well-garnished,—
He delivered a tale round, unvarnished.

XXI.

"Ah, Youth!" ran the Abbot's admonishment,
"Thine error scarce moves my astonishment.
For—why shall I shrink from asserting?—
Myself have had hopes of converting
The foolish to wisdom, till, sober,
My life found its May grow October.
I talked and I wrote, but, one morning,
Life's Autumn bore fruit in this warning:
'*Let tongue rest, and quiet thy quill be!*
Earth is earth and not heaven, and ne'er will be.'
Man's work is to labour and leaven—
As best he may—earth here with heaven;
'T is work for work's sake that he 's needing:
Let him work on and on as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding!
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.
A Spare-Horse? Be rather a thill-horse,
Or—what 's the plain truth—just a mill-horse!
Earth 's a mill where we grind and wear mufflers:
A whip awaits shirkers and shufflers
Who slacken their pace, sick of lugging
At what don't advance for their tugging.

Though round goes the mill, we must still post
On and on as if moving the mill-post.
So, grind away, mouth-wise and pen-wise,
Do all that we can to make men wise!
And if men prefer to be foolish,
Ourselves have proved horse-like not mulish:
Sent grist, a good sackful, to hopper,
And worked as the Master thought proper.
Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbot;
Stick thou, Son, to daub-brush and dab-pot!
But, soft! I scratch hard on the scab hot?
Though cured of thy plague, there may linger
A pimple I fray with rough finger?
So soon could my homily transmute
Thy brass into gold? Why, the man 's mute!"

XXII.

"Ay, Father, I 'm mute with admiring
How Nature's indulgence untiring
Still bids us turn deaf ear to Reason's
Best rhetoric—clutch at all seasons
And hold fast to what 's proved untenable!
Thy maxim is—Man 's not amenable
To argument: whereof by consequence—
Thine arguments reach me: a non-sequence!

Yet blush not discouraged, O Father!
I stand unconverted, the rather
That nowise I need a conversion.
No live man (I cap thy assertion)
By argument ever could take hold
Of me. 'T was the dead thing, the clay-cold,
Which grinned '*Art thou so in a hurry*
That out of warm light thou must skurry
And join me down here in the dungeon
Because, above, one's Jack and one—John,
One's swift in the race, one—a hobbler,
One's a crowned king, and one—a capped cobbler,
Rich and poor, sage and fool, virtuous, vicious?
Why complain? Art thou so unsuspicious
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing
His part in the after-construction
—Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal,
And act, and let act, in existence!
For, as thou art clapped hence or hissed hence,
Thou hast thy promotion or otherwise.
And why must wise thou have thy brother wise
Because in rehearsal thy cue be
To shine by the side of a booby?

No polishing garnet to ruby!
All 's well that ends well—through Art's magic
Some end, whether comic or tragic,
The Artist has purposed, be certain!
Explained at the fall of the curtain—
In showing thy wisdom at odds with
That folly: he tries men and gods with
No problem for weak wits to solve meant,
But one worth such Author's evolvement.
So, back nor disturb play's production
By giving thy brother instruction
To throw up his fool's-part allotted!
Lest haply thyself prove besotted
When stript, for thy pains, of that costume
Of sage, which has bred the imposthume
I prick to relieve thee of,—Vanity!'

XXIII.

"So, Father, behold me in sanity!
I 'm back to the palette and mahlstick:
And as for Man—let each and all stick
To what was prescribed them at starting
Once planted as fools—no departing
From folly one inch, *sæculorum*
In sæcula! Pass me the jorum,

And push me the platter—my stomach
Retains, through its fasting, still some ache—
And then, with your kind *Benedicite*,
Good-bye!"

XXIV.

I have told with simplicity
My tale, dropped those harsh analytics,
And tried to content you, my critics,
Who greeted my early uprising!
I knew you through all the disguising,
Droll dogs, as I jumped up, cried "Heyday!
This Monday is—what else but May-day?
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows,
Are surely the privileged fellows.
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows,"
(I threw up the window) "your pleasure?"

XXV.

Then he who directed the measure—
An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,
"We critics as sweeps out your chimbly!
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir!
Who spares coal in kitchen an't you, sir!

And neighbours complain it 's no joke, sir,
—You ought to consume your own smoke, sir!"

XXVI.

Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you—
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I 'm pious
However: 't was God made you dingy
And me—with no need to be stingy
Of soap, when 't is sixpence the packet.
So, dance away, boys, dust my jacket,
Bang drum and blow fife—ay, and rattle
Your brushes, for that 's half the battle!
Don't trample the grass,—hocus-pocus
With grime my Spring snowdrop and crocus,—
And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
Who knows but you give me an inkling
How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
Of regular drum and triangle?
Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 't is proven
I break rule as bad as Beethoven.
"That chord now—a groan or a grunt is 't?
Schumann's self was no worse contrapuntist.
No ear! or if ear, so tough-gristled—
He thought that he sung while he whistled!"

XXVII.

So, this time I whistle, not sing at all,
My story, the largess I fling at all
And every the rough there whose *aubade*
Did its best to amuse me,—nor *so* bad!
Take my thanks, pick up largess, and scamper
Off free, ere your mirth gets a damper!
You 've Monday, your one day, your fun-day,
While mine is a year that 's all Sunday.
I 've seen you, times—who knows how many?—
Dance in here, strike up, play the zany,
Make mouths at the tenant, hoot warning
You 'll find him decamped next May-morning;
Then scuttle away, glad to 'scape hence
With—kicks? no, but laughter and ha'pence!
Mine 's freehold, by grace of the grand Lord
Who lets out the ground here,—my landlord:
To him I pay quit-rent—devotion;
Nor hence shall I budge, I 've a notion,
Nay, here shall my whistling and singing
Set all his street's echoes a-ringing
Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle* us!

Troop, all of you—man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*
First comes to her hand—things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in—
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there—
He 'll think, as the pickle he curses,
I 've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens: so, sauced in
Your own sauce, . . .[1]

XXVIII.

But, back to my Knight of the Pencil,
Dismissed to his fresco and stencil!
Whose story—begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle,—
To small enough purpose were studied
If it ends with crown cracked or nose bloodied.

[1] No, please! For

"Who would be satirical
On a thing so very small?"—PRINTER'S DEVIL.

Come, critics,—not shake hands, excuse me!
But—say have you grudged to amuse me
This once in the forty-and-over
Long years since you trampled my clover
And scared from my house-eaves each sparrow
I never once harmed by that arrow
Of song, *karterotaton belos*,
(Which Pindar declares the true *melos*)
I was forging and filing and finishing,
And no whit my labours diminishing
Because, though high up in a chamber
Where none of your kidney may clamber
Your hullabaloo would approach me?
Was it "grammar" wherein you would "coach" me—
You,—pacing in even that paddock
Of language allotted you *ad hoc*,
With a clog at your fetlocks,—you—scorners
Of me free of all its four corners?
Was it "clearness of words which convey thought?"
Ay, if words never needed enswathe aught
But ignorance, impudence, envy
And malice—what word-swathe would then vie
With yours for a clearness crystalline?
But had you to put in one small line
Some thought big and bouncing—as noddle
Of goose, born to cackle and waddle

And bite at man's heel as goose-wont is,
Never felt plague its puny *os frontis*—
You 'd know, as you hissed, spat and sputtered,
Clear cackle is easily uttered!

XXIX.

Lo, I 've laughed out my laugh on this mirth-day!
Beside, at week's end, dawns my birth-day,
That *hebdome, hieron emar*—
(More things in a day than you deem are!)
—*Tei gar Apollona chrusaora*
Egeinato Leto. So, gray or ray
Betide me, six days hence, I 'm vexed here
By no sweep, that 's certain, till next year!
"Vexed?"—roused from what else were insipid ease!
Leave snoring a-bed to Pheidippides!
We 'll up and work! won't we, Euripides?

AT THE "MERMAID"

1876.

> The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
> Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?
>
> B. JONSON. (*Adapted.*)

I.

I—"Next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

II.

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.

Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
Here 's my life-long work: and where
—Where 's your warrant or my token
I 'm the dead king's son and heir?

III.

Here 's my work: does work discover—
What was rest from work—my life?
Did I live man's hater, lover?
Leave the world at peace, at strife?
Call earth ugliness or beauty?
See things there in large or small?
Use to pay its Lord my duty?
Use to own a lord at all?

IV.

Blank of such a record, truly
Here 's the work I hand, this scroll,
Yours to take or leave; as duly,
Mine remains the unproffered soul.
So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

v.

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

VI.

Rarities or, as he 'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own:
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone!
Whence—the comfort set a-strutting,
Whence—the outcry "Haste, behold!
Bard's breast open wide, past shutting,
Shows what brass we took for gold!"

VII.

Friends, I doubt not he 'd display you
Brass—myself call orichalc,—
Furnish much amusement; pray you
Therefore, be content I baulk

Him and you, and bar my portal!
Here 's my work outside: opine
What 's inside me mean and mortal!
Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

VIII.

Which is—not to buy your laurel
As last king did, nothing loth.
Tale adorned and pointed moral
Gained him praise and pity both.
Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
Forth by scores oaths, curses flew:
Proving you were cater-cousins,
Kith and kindred, king and you!

IX.

Whereas do I ne'er so little
(Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
Where 's one plague that claims respect?

X.

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did, and does, smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I 'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

XI.

What, like you, he proved—your Pilgrim—
This our world a wilderness,
Earth still grey and heaven still grim,
Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
Men all rogues and women—say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
Grown folk drop or throw away?

XII.

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.

I find earth not grey but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All 's blue.

XIII.

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
Rogues and fools enough: the more
Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
Some few honest to the core.
Scan the near high, scout the far low!
"But the low come close:" what then?
Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

XIV.

Womankind—"the cat-like nature,
False and fickle, vain and weak"—
What of this sad nomenclature
Suits my tongue, if I must speak?
Does the sex invite, repulse so,
Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
So becalm but to convulse so,
Decking heads and breaking hearts?

XV.

Well may you blaspheme at fortune!
I "threw Venus" (Ben, expound!)
Never did I need importune
Her, of all the Olympian round.
Blessings on my benefactress!
Cursings suit—for aught I know—
Those who twitched her by the back tress,
Tugged and thought to turn her—so!

XVI.

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
Thus I 'm left with,—joy or grief
Be the issue,—I abandon
Hope or care you name me Chief!
Chief and king and Lord 's anointed,
I?—who never once have wished
Death before the day appointed:
Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

XVII.

"Ah, but so I shall not enter,
Scroll in hand, the common heart—
Stopped at surface: since at centre
Song should reach *Welt-schmerz*, world-smart!"

"Enter in the heart?" Its shelly
Cuirass guard mine, fore and aft!
Such song "enters in the belly
And is cast out in the draught."

XVIII.

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
"Kingship" quotha? I shall wait—
Waive the present time: some new age . . .
But let fools anticipate!
Meanwhile greet me—"friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will," my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With "Next Poet"—(Manners, Ben!)

HOUSE.

1876.

I.

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
"Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?

II.

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
"Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

III.

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

IV.

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced :
And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped : exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt !
" Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth !
What a parcel of musty old books about !
He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health !

VII.

" I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
A brasier ?—the pagan, he burned perfumes !
You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed :
His wife and himself had separate rooms."

VIII.

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'T is the fall of its frontage permits you feast
On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

IX.

Outside should suffice for evidence:
And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense–
No optics like yours, at any rate!

X.

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! '*With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!"
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP.

1876.

I.

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II.

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

III.

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,

—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV.

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V.

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he 's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI.

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that 's clear.

VII.

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

VIII.

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX.

Nowise! At back of all that spread
Of merchandize, woe 's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
The owner couched, his ware behind,
—In cupboard suited to his mind.

X.

For why? He saw no use of life
But, while he drove a roaring trade,

To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
Yet zero in my profits made!

XI.

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII.

'T was lodging best to live most nigh
(Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

XIII.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped!

XIV.

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare!
'*Sell and scud home*' be shop's affair!"

XV.

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

XVI.

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII.

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang

On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII.

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

XXI.

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

XXII.

But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. I.

1876.

I.

Over the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
One reconcilement.

II.

Orbed as appointed,
Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
One from the other.

All 's lend-and-borrow;
Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
Angel weds devil!

III.

"Which things must—*why* be?"
Vain our endeavour!
So shall things aye be
As they were ever.
"Such things should *so* be!"
Sage our desistence!
Rough-smooth let globe be,
Mixed—man's existence!

IV.

Man—wise and foolish,
Lover and scorner,
Docile and mulish—
Keep each his corner!
Honey yet gall of it!
There 's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only, I 'm dying!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. II.

1876.

I.

COULD I but live again,
  Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
  Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
  Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
  Pass to fruition?

II.

"Soft!" I 'd say, "Soul mine!
  Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
  Digging out deniers!

Let the dazed hawk soar,
  Claim the sun's rights too!
Turf 't is thy walk 's o'er,
  Foliage thy flight 's to."

III.

Only a learner,
  Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
  I would teach no one.
I am earth's native:
  No rearranging it!
I be creative,
  Chopping and changing it?

IV.

March, men, my fellows!
  Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
  Fancy you love me:
Those who, below me,
  (Distance makes great so)
Free to forego me,
  Fancy you hate so!

v.

Praising, reviling,
  Worst head and best head,
Past me defiling,
  Never arrested,
Wanters, abounders,
  March, in gay mixture,
Men, my surrounders!
  I am the fixture.

vi.

So shall I fear thee,
  Mightiness yonder!
Mock-sun—more near thee,
  What is to wonder?
So shall I love thee,
  Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
  Star that now sparklest!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES.

1876.

I.

HERE 's my case. Of old I used to love him
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,—
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

II.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
Present, he would find me at his side.

III.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

IV.

"Some day" proving—no day! Here 's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He 's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

V.

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts!—How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—
Call them forgery from A to Z!

VI.

"Actions? Where 's your certain proof" (they bother)
"He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action—claimed by men, a multitude?"

VII.

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—
Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!
He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

VIII.

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
One thing 's sure enough: 't is neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

IX.

All my days, I 'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
Lives my friend because I love him still!"

X.

Ah, but there 's a menace someone utters!
"What and if your friend at home play tricks?
Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks?

XI.

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?
Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal?
Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,*
Does see now, and presently shall feel'?"

XII.

"Why, that makes your friend a monster!" say you:
"Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?" Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God?

NATURAL MAGIC.

1876.

I.

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt—I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

II.

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed!

Vide opens the entrance: where 's cold now, where 's
gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your
winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE.

1876.

I.

Flower—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

II.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

BIFURCATION.

1876.

We were two lovers; let me lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe—
"I loved him; but my reason bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the tempter's bribe
Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life's far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm-in-arm with friend.
So, truth turned falsehood: '*How I loathe a flower,*
How prize the pavement!' still caressed his ear—
The deafish friend's—through life's day, hour by hour,
As he laughed (coughing) '*Ay, it would appear!*'
But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broadway, were the best—
Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.

I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness fuse."

Inscribe on mine—"I loved her: love's track lay
O'er sand and pebble, as all travellers know.
Duty led through a smiling country, gay
With greensward where the rose and lily blow.
'*Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!*' said she;
''*T is duty I abide by: homely sward*
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted!' But man needs must move,
Keep moving—whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love?
No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-block
But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,
There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock,
Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried '*All's well!*
Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne'er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, whereof—since here
One must suffice a man—why, this one must!'"

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint
The simple—which holds sinner, which holds saint!

NUMPHOLEPTOS.

1876.

STILL you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit, lies, transformed at last
To sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love's birth at the limit's happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn!—true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay—I scarce should know
From gold's self, thus suffused! For gold means love.
What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,

Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavour! As my lips now kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh and hard—
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried yet through a world which brings me back

Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there—take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love—not placid pardon now—his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unembued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,
So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon—not love—in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon coloured shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray

Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began—before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source
And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage—no stay nor stint
To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused
With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay—flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatsoe'er befell,
I followed, whereso'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage,—trode that tinct whereof the trace

On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead
Your own permission—your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams through;
Till, last . . . but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave . . .
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot
May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return

Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,
The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement! Like enough!
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with! O that ear

All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Feminity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein . . .

Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this—the crimson-quest—
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile?—which I obey.

APPEARANCES.

1876

I.

And so you found that poor room dull,
Dark, hardly to your taste, my dear?
Its features seemed unbeautiful:
But this I know—'t was there, not here,
You plighted troth to me, the word
Which—ask that poor room how it heard

II.

And this rich room obtains your praise
Unqualified,—so bright, so fair,
So all whereat perfection stays?
Ay, but remember—here, not there,
The other word was spoken! Ask
This rich room how you dropped the mask

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

1876.

I.

No protesting, dearest!
Hardly kisses even!
Don't we both know how it ends?
How the greenest leaf turns serest,
Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven,
Lovers—friends?

II.

You would build a mansion,
I would weave a bower
—Want the heart for enterprise.
Walls admit of no expansion:
Trellis-work may haply flower
Twice the size.

III.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
New buds, old blooms after.
Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
Rooftree scarce support a rafter,
Walls lie wrecked?"

IV.

You are young, my princess!
I am hardly older:
Yet—I steal a glance behind.
Dare I tell you what convinces
Timid me that you, if bolder,
Bold—are blind?

V.

Where we plan our dwelling
Glooms a graveyard surely!
Headstone, footstone moss may drape,—
Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
But, though corpses rot obscurely,
Ghosts escape.

VI.

Ghosts! O breathing Beauty,
Give my frank word pardon!
What if I—somehow, somewhere—
Pledged my soul to endless duty
Many a time and oft? Be hard on
Love—laid there?

VII.

Nay, blame grief that 's fickle,
Time that proves a traitor,
Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
Laid Love low, through flowers which later
Shroud the corpse!

VIII.

And you, my winsome lady,
Whisper with like frankness!
Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are yon—which shimmer mid the shady
Where moss and violet run to rankness—
Tombs or no?

IX.

Who taxes you with murder?
My hands are clean—or nearly!
Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
Though now—alas!

X.

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
Only Love's ghost plays truant,
And warns us have in wholesome awe
Durable mansionry; that 's wherefore
I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
—Life, to law.

XI.

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempts rain and hail and thunder.
If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope,—why, boughs were agile;
If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
Wreathing—rose!

XII.

So, truce to the protesting,
  So, muffled be the kisses!
    For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
  Ask else Penelope, Ulysses—
    Old in youth!

XIII.

For why should ghosts feel angered?
  Let all their interference
    Be faint march-music in the air!
"Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!
  Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,
    Laggard pair!"

XIV.

The while you clasp me closer,
  The while I press you deeper,
    As safe we chuckle,—under breath,
Yet all the slyer, the jocoser,—
  "So, life can boast its day, like leap-year.
    Stolen from death!"

XV.

Ah me—the sudden terror!
Hence quick—avaunt, avoid me,
You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!
Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!
So, 't was Death's self that clipped and coyed me,
Loved—and lied!

XVI.

Ay, dead loves are the potent!
Like any cloud they used you,
Mere semblance you, but substance they!
Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!
Mere flesh—their spirit interfused you!
Hence, I say!

XVII.

All theirs, none yours the glamour!
Theirs each low word that won me,
Soft look that found me Love's, and left
What else but you—the tears and clamour
That 's all your very own! Undone me—
Ghost-bereft!

HERVE RIEL.

1876.

I.

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II.

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;

And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—
or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III.

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,—
Shall the 'Formidable' here, with her twelve and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV.

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V.

Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!

But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's a way!
Only let me lead the line,

Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this 'Formidable' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,—
—Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII.

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!

See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII.

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!

Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's
not Damfreville."

X.

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,

As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 't is ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!

You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé
Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the
Belle Aurore!

A FORGIVENESS.

1876.

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!"
The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains
His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appal him: happy to excess,—
Work freely done should balance happiness

Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof
I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe
Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"
I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
—Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran:
"A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambuscade,—
A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate 's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,
And—back to that last fancy of the train—
"A danger risked for hope of just a word
With—which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?
Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana 's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgeling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be

Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June
Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose:
Or whether hungry for my hate—who knows?—
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment:—anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now
The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse
As well as love—you are to recollect!

"Stay!" she said. "Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that 's spotless hitherto—your own!
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last!
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower's bondage: tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite!
I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike

Out of existence—hate and love! Whence love?
That 's safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,
At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me!"

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—
Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient: I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—
Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such! As for my love-romance—
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup!

Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me—a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember,—staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost:
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all!
Now, work—no word before the curtain fall!"

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant:
My "word," permissible in death's event,
Would be—truth, soul to soul; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game
If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince

No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride
Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture—every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
—Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord; where a speech was due
There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too
Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There 's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her—
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,
Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence.

Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace, where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door
As we two stood by the saloon—now blank
And disencumbered of its guests—there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

"I half forget
The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word—if you grant
That grace—within a certain room you called
Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break
The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentining ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are,—
Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—
Always in silence,—till I reach the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of entrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand—
The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height,—'t was here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung

That last toy on the table—gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience?—own that each
Equalled advantage—sportsman's—statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face.
She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain
Why that first struck me, know—not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public,—all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that face
I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize:
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill,—

Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not
An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,
And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that 's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished
sight,
Reported daily she it was—not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed
May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to the ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract
And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp
While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
—These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open—what intend
They else but water-purlings—pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,

Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank,
But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank
From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game
Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words,
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know
This shame, my three years' torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most
In men is—action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—

Prompt follows placability, regret,
Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.
Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

"Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!"

"No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied."

"And yet you loved me?"

"Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"

"Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself *I* learn—who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle, survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt
Of your all-despicable life—perturb
The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough—
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life

Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
—Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown
Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would—how rewardingly!—
Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.
No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress
Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise—
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment

Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
'*I loved my husband and I hated—who*
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here
Lies paper!"

"Would my blood for ink suffice!"

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.
Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away

In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

CENCIAJA.

1876.

Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato.—*Italian Proverb.*

May I print, Shelley, how it came to pass
That when your Beatrice seemed—by lapse
Of many a long month since her sentence fell—
Assured of pardon for the parricide,—
By intercession of staunch friends, or, say,
By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt,—
Suddenly all things changed and Clement grew
"Stern," as you state, "nor to be moved nor bent,
But said these three words coldly '*She must die;*
Subjoining '*Pardon? Paolo Santa Croce*
Murdered his mother also yestereve,
And he is fled: she shall not flee at least!'
—So, to the letter, sentence was fulfilled?
Shelley, may I condense verbosity
That lies before me, into some few words
Of English, and illustrate your superb

Achievement by a rescued anecdote,
No great things, only new and true beside?
As if some mere familiar of a house
Should venture to accost the group at gaze
Before its Titian, famed the wide world through,
And supplement such pictured masterpiece
By whisper "Searching in the archives here,
I found the reason of the Lady's fate,
And how by accident it came to pass
She wears the halo and displays the palm:
Who, haply, else had never suffered—no,
Nor graced our gallery, by consequence."
Who loved the work would like the little news:
Who lauds your poem lends an ear to me
Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell' Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide
With Paolo his own brother,—he whose crime
And flight induced "those three words—She must die."
Thus I unroll you then the manuscript.

"God's justice"—(of the multiplicity
Of such communications extant still,
Recording, each, injustice done by God
In person of his Vicar-upon-earth,

Scarce one but leads off to the self-same tune)—
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Croce."

Many times
The youngster,—having been importunate
That Marchesine Costanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty,—
And meeting just as often with rebuff,—
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady—thus.

He first, to cover his iniquity,
Writes to Onofrio Santa Croce, then
Authoritative lord, acquainting him
Their mother was contamination—wrought
Like hell-fire in the beauty of their House
By dissoluteness and abandonment
Of soul and body to impure delight.
Moreover, since she suffered from disease,
Those symptoms which her death made manifest

Hydroptic, he affirmed were fruits of sin
About to bring confusion and disgrace
Upon the ancient lineage and high fame
O' the family, when published. Duty bound,
He asked his brother—what a son should do?

Which when Marchese dell' Oriolo heard
By letter, being absent at his land
Oriolo, he made answer, this, no more:
"It must behove a son,—things haply so,—
To act as honour prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers"—here advice broke off.

By which advice informed and fortified,
As he professed himself—since bound by birth
To hear God's voice in primogeniture—
Paolo, who kept his mother company
In her domain Subiaco, straightway dared
His whole enormity of enterprise
And, falling on her, stabbed the lady dead;
Whose death demonstrated her innocence,
And happened,—by the way,—since Jesus Christ
Died to save man, just sixteen hundred years.
Costanza was of aspect beautiful
Exceedingly, and seemed, although in age

Sixty about, to far surpass her peers
The coëtaneous dames, in youth and grace.

Done the misdeed, its author takes to flight,
Foiling thereby the justice of the world:
Not God's however,—God, be sure, knows well
The way to clutch a culprit. Witness here!
The present sinner, when he least expects,
Snug-cornered somewhere i' the Basilicate,
Stumbles upon his death by violence.
A man of blood assaults a man of blood
And slays him somehow. This was afterward:
Enough, he promptly met with his deserts,
And, ending thus, permits we end with him,
And push forthwith to this important point—
His matricide fell out, of all the days,
Precisely when the law-procedure closed
Respecting Count Francesco Cenci's death
Chargeable on his daughter, sons and wife.
"Thus patricide was matched with matricide,"
A poet not inelegantly rhymed:
Nay, fratricide—those Princes Massimi!—
Which so disturbed the spirit of the Pope
That all the likelihood Rome entertained
Of Beatrice's pardon vanished straight,
And she endured the piteous death.

Now see
The sequel—what effect commandment had
For strict inquiry into this last case,
When Cardinal Aldobrandini (great
His efficacy—nephew to the Pope)
Was bidden crush—ay, though his very hand
Got soil i' the act—crime spawning everywhere!
Because, when all endeavour had been used
To catch the aforesaid Paolo, all in vain—
"Make perquisition" quoth our Eminence,
"Throughout his now deserted domicile!
Ransack the palace, roof and floor, to find
If haply any scrap of writing, hid
In nook or corner, may convict—who knows?—
Brother Onofrio of intelligence
With brother Paolo, as in brotherhood
Is but too likely: crime spawns everywhere."

And, every cranny searched accordingly,
There comes to light—O lynx-eyed Cardinal!—
Onofrio's unconsidered writing-scrap,
The letter in reply to Paolo's prayer,
The word of counsel that—things proving so,
Paolo should act the proper knightly part,
And do as was incumbent on a son,
A brother—and a man of birth, be sure!

Whereat immediately the officers
Proceeded to arrest Onofrio—found
At foot-ball, child's play, unaware of harm,
Safe with his friends, the Orsini, at their seat
Monte Giordano; as he left the house
He came upon the watch in wait for him
Set by the Barigel,—was caught and caged.

News of which capture being, that same hour,
Conveyed to Rome, forthwith our Eminence
Commands Taverna, Governor and Judge,
To have the process in especial care,
Be, first to last, not only president
In person, but inquisitor as well,
Nor trust the by-work to a substitute:
Bids him not, squeamish, keep the bench, but scrub
The floor of Justice, so to speak,—go try
His best in prison with the criminal:
Promising, as reward for by-work done
Fairly on all-fours, that, success obtained
And crime avowed, or such connivency
With crime as should procure a decent death—
Himself will humbly beg—which means, procure—
The Hat and Purple from his relative
The Pope, and so repay a diligence
Which, meritorious in the Cenci-case,

Mounts plainly here to Purple and the Hat.

Whereupon did my lord the Governor
So masterfully exercise the task
Enjoined him, that he, day by day, and week
By week, and month by month, from first to last
Toiled for the prize: now, punctual at his place,
Played Judge, and now, assiduous at his post,
Inquisitor—pressed cushion and scoured plank,
Early and late. Noon's fervour and night's chill,
Nought moved whom morn would, purpling, make amends!
So that observers laughed as, many a day,
He left home, in July when day is flame,
Posted to Tordinona-prison, plunged
Into a vault where daylong night is ice,
There passed his eight hours on a stretch, content,
Examining Onofrio: all the stress
Of all examination steadily
Converging into one pin-point,—he pushed
Tentative now of head and now of heart.
As when the nuthatch taps and tries the nut
This side and that side till the kernel sound,—
So did he press the sole and single point
—What was the very meaning of the phrase
'*Do as beseems an honoured cavalier*'?

Which one persistent question-torture,—plied
Day by day, week by week, and month by month,
Morn, noon and night,—fatigued away a mind
Grown imbecile by darkness, solitude,
And one vivacious memory gnawing there
As when a corpse is coffined with a snake:
—Fatigued Onofrio into what might seem
Admission that perchance his judgment groped
So blindly, feeling for an issue—aught
With semblance of an issue from the toils
Cast of a sudden round feet late so free,
He possibly might have envisaged, scarce
Recoiled from—even were the issue death
—Even her death whose life was death and worse!
Always provided that the charge of crime,
Each jot and tittle of the charge were true.
In such a sense, belike, he might advise
His brother to expurgate crime with . . . well,
With blood, if blood must follow on '*the course*
Taken as might beseem a cavalier.'

Whereupon process ended, and report
Was made without a minute of delay
To Clement who, because of those two crimes
O' the Massimi and Cenci flagrant late,
Must needs impatiently desire result

Result obtained, he bade the Governor
Summon the Congregation and despatch.
Summons made, sentence passed accordingly
—Death by beheading. When his death-decree
Was intimated to Onofrio, all
Man could do—that did he to save himself.
'T was much, the having gained for his defence
The Advocate o' the Poor, with natural help
Of many noble friendly persons fain
To disengage a man of family,
So young too, from his grim entanglement:
But Cardinal Aldobrandini ruled
There must be no diversion of the law.
Justice is justice, and the magistrate
Bears not the sword in vain. Who sins must die.

So, the Marchese had his head cut off,
With Rome to see, a concourse infinite,
In Place Saint Angelo beside the Bridge:
Where, demonstrating magnanimity
Adequate to his birth and breed,—poor boy!—
He made the people the accustomed speech,
Exhorted them to true faith, honest works,
And special good behaviour as regards
A parent of no matter what the sex,
Bidding each son take warning from himself.

Truly, it was considered in the boy
Stark staring lunacy, no less, to snap
So plain a bait, be hooked and hauled ashore
By such an angler as the Cardinal!
Why make confession of his privity
To Paolo's enterprise? Mere sealing lips—
Or, better, saying "When I counselled him
'*To do as might beseem a cavalier,*'
What could I mean but '*Hide our parent's shame*
As Christian ought, by aid of Holy Church!
Bury it in a convent—ay, beneath
Enough dotation to prevent its ghost
From troubling earth!'" Mere saying thus,—'t is plain,
Not only were his life the recompense,
But he had manifestly proved himself
True Christian, and in lieu of punishment
Got praise of all men. So the populace.

Anyhow, when the Pope made promise good
(That of Aldobrandini, near and dear)
And gave Taverna, who had toiled so much,
A Cardinal's equipment, some such word
As this from mouth to ear went saucily:
"Taverna's cap is dyed in what he drew
From Santa Croce's veins!" So joked the world.

I add: Onofrio left one child behind,
A daughter named Valeria, dowered with grace
Abundantly of soul and body, doomed
To life the shorter for her father's fate.
By death of her, the Marquisate returned
To that Orsini House from whence it came:
Oriolo having passed as donative
To Santa Croce from their ancestors.

And no word more? By all means! Would you know
The authoritative answer, when folk urged
"What made Aldobrandini, hound-like staunch,
Hunt out of life a harmless simpleton?"
The answer was—"Hatred implacable,
By reason they were rivals in their love."
The Cardinal's desire was to a dame
Whose favour was Onofrio's. Pricked with pride,
The simpleton must ostentatiously
Display a ring, the Cardinal's love-gift,
Given to Onofrio as the lady's gage;
Which ring on finger, as he put forth hand
To draw a tapestry, the Cardinal
Saw and knew, gift and owner, old and young;
Whereon a fury entered him—the fire
He quenched with what could quench fire only—blood.

Nay, more: "there want not who affirm to boot,
The unwise boy, a certain festal eve,
Feigned ignorance of who the wight might be
That pressed too closely on him with a crowd.
He struck the Cardinal a blow: and then,
To put a face upon the incident,
Dared next day, smug as ever, go pay court
I' the Cardinal's antechamber. Mark and mend,
Ye youth, by this example how may greed
Vainglorious operate in worldly souls!"

So ends the chronicler, beginning with
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never till it reach delinquency."
Ay, or how otherwise had come to pass
That Victor rules, this present year, in Rome?

FILIPPO BALDINUCCI ON THE PRIVILEGE OF BURIAL.

A REMINISCENCE OF A.D. 1676.

1876.

I.

"No, boy, we must not"—so began
My Uncle (he 's with God long since)
A-petting me, the good old man!
"We must not"—and he seemed to wince,
And lost that laugh whereto had grown
His chuckle at my piece of news,
How cleverly I aimed my stone—
"I fear we must not pelt the Jews!

II.

"When I was young indeed,—ah, faith
Was young and strong in Florence too!
We Christians never dreamed of scathe
Because we cursed or kicked the crew.

But now—well, well! The olive-crops
Weighed double then, and Arno's pranks
Would always spare religious shops
Whenever he o'erflowed his banks!

III.

"I 'll tell you"—and his eye regained
Its twinkle—"tell you something choice!"
Something may help you keep unstained
Your honest zeal to stop the voice
Of unbelief with stone-throw—spite
Of laws, which modern fools enact,
That we must suffer Jews in sight
Go wholly unmolested! Fact!

IV.

"There was, then, in my youth, and yet
Is, by our San Frediano, just
Below the Blessed Olivet,
A wayside ground wherein they thrust
Their dead,—these Jews,—the more our shame!
Except that, so they will but die,
Christians perchance incur no blame
In giving hogs a hoist to stye.

V.

"There, anyhow, Jews stow away
Their dead; and,—such their insolence,—
Slink at odd times to sing and pray
As Christians do—all make-pretence!—
Which wickedness they perpetrate
Because they think no Christians see.
They reckoned here, at any rate,
Without their host: ha, ha, he, he!

VI.

"For, what should join their plot of ground
But a good Farmer's Christian field?
The Jews had hedged their corner round
With bramble-bush to keep concealed
Their doings: for the public road
Ran betwixt this their ground and that
The Farmer's, where he ploughed and sowed,
Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.

VII.

"So, properly to guard his store
And gall the unbelievers too,
He builds a shrine and, what is more,
Procures a painter whom I knew,

One Buti (he 's with God) to paint
A holy picture there—no less
Than Virgin Mary free from taint
Borne to the sky by angels: yes!

VIII.

"Which shrine he fixed,—who says him nay?—
A-facing with its picture-side
Not, as you 'd think, the public way,
But just where sought these hounds to hide
Their carrion from that very truth
Of Mary's triumph: not a hound
Could act his mummeries uncouth
But Mary shamed the pack all round!

IX.

"Now, if it was amusing, judge!
—To see the company arrive,
Each Jew intent to end his trudge
And take his pleasure (though alive)
With all his Jewish kith and kin
Below ground, have his venom out,
Sharpen his wits for next day's sin,
Curse Christians, and so home, no doubt!

X.

"Whereas, each phyz upturned beholds
Mary, I warrant, soaring brave!
And in a trice, beneath the folds
Of filthy garb which gowns each knave,
Down drops it—there to hide grimace,
Contortion of the mouth and nose
At finding Mary in the place
They 'd keep for Pilate, I suppose!

XI.

"At last, they will not brook—not they!—
Longer such outrage on their tribe:
So, in some hole and corner, lay
Their heads together—how to bribe
The meritorious Farmer's self
To straight undo his work, restore
Their chance to meet and muse on pelf—
Pretending sorrow, as before!

XII.

"Forthwith, a posse, if you please,
Of Rabbi This and Rabbi That
Almost go down upon their knees
To get him lay the picture flat.

The spokesman, eighty years of age,
Grey as a badger, with a goat's
Not only beard but bleat, 'gins wage
War with our Mary. Thus he dotes:—

XIII.

"'Friends, grant a grace! How Hebrews toil
Through life in Florence—why relate
To those who lay the burden, spoil
Our paths of peace? We bear our fate.
But when with life the long toil ends,
Why must you—the expression craves
Pardon, but truth compels me, friends!—
Why must you plague us in our graves?

XIV.

"'Thoughtlessly plague, I would believe!
For how can you—the lords of ease
By nurture, birthright—e'en conceive
Our luxury to lie with trees
And turf,—the cricket and the bird
Left for our last companionship:
No harsh deed, no unkindly word,
No frowning brow nor scornful lip!

XV.

"'Death's luxury, we now rehearse
While, living, through your streets we fare
And take your hatred: nothing worse
Have we, once dead and safe, to bear!
So we refresh our souls, fulfil
Our works, our daily tasks; and thus
Gather you grain—earth's harvest—still
The wheat for you, the straw for us.

XVI.

"'What flouting in a face, what harm,
In just a lady borne from bier
By boys' heads, wings for leg and arm?'
You question. Friends, the harm is here—
That just when our last sigh is heaved,
And we would fain thank God and you
For labour done and peace achieved,
Back comes the Past in full review!

XVII.

"'At sight of just that simple flag,
Starts the foe-feeling serpent-like
From slumber. Leave it lulled, nor drag—
Though fangless—forth, what needs must strike

When stricken sore, though stroke be vain
Against the mailed oppressor! Give
Play to our fancy that we gain
Life's rights when once we cease to live!

XVIII.

"'*Thus much to courtesy, to kind,*
To conscience! Now to Florence folk!
There's core beneath this apple-rind,
Beneath this white-of-egg there's yolk!
Beneath this prayer to courtesy,
Kind, conscience—there's a sum to pouch!
How many ducats down will buy
Our shame's removal, sirs? Avouch!

XIX.

"'*Removal, not destruction, sirs!*
Just turn your picture! Let it front
The public path! Or memory errs,
Or that same public path is wont
To witness many a chance befall
Of lust, theft, bloodshed—sins enough,
Wherein our Hebrew part is small.
Convert yourselves!'—he cut up rough.

XX.

" Look you, how soon a service paid
Religion yields the servant fruit!
A prompt reply our Farmer made
So following: '*Sirs, to grant your suit*
Involves much danger! How? Transpose
Our Lady? Stop the chastisement,
All for your good, herself bestows?
What wonder if I grudge consent?

XXI.

"'*— Yet grant it: since, what cash I take*
Is so much saved from wicked use.
We know you! And, for Mary's sake,
A hundred ducats shall induce
Concession to your prayer. One day
Suffices: Master Buti's brush
Turns Mary round the other way,
And deluges your side with slush.

XXII.

"'*Down with the ducats therefore!*' Dump,
Dump, dump it falls, each counted piece,
Hard gold. Then out of door they stump,
These dogs, each brisk as with new lease

Of life, I warrant,—glad he 'll die
Henceforward just as he may choose,
Be buried and in clover lie!
Well said Esaias—'*stiff-necked Jews!*'

XXIII.

"Off posts without a minute's loss
Our Farmer, once the cash in poke
And summons Buti—ere its gloss
Have time to fade from off the joke—
To chop and change his work, undo
The done side, make the side, now blank,
Recipient of our Lady—who,
Displaced thus, had these dogs to thank!

XXIV.

"Now, boy, you 're hardly to instruct
In technicalities of Art!
My nephew's childhood sure has sucked
Along with mother's-milk some part
Of painter's-practice—learned, at least,
How expeditiously is plied
A work in fresco—never ceased
When once begun—a day, each side.

XXV.

"So, Buti—(he 's with God)—begins:
First covers up the shrine all round
With hoarding; then, as like as twins,
Paints, t' other side the burial-ground,
New Mary, every point the same;
Next, sluices over, as agreed,
The old; and last—but, spoil the game
By telling you? Not I, indeed!

XXVI.

"Well, ere the week was half at end,
Out came the object of this zeal,
This fine alacrity to spend
Hard money for mere dead men's weal!
How think you? That old spokesman Jew
Was High Priest, and he had a wife
As old, and she was dying too,
And wished to end in peace her life!

XXVII.

"And he must humour dying whims,
And soothe her with the idle hope
They 'd say their prayers and sing their hymns
As if her husband were the Pope!

And she did die—believing just
This privilege was purchased! Dead
In comfort through her foolish trust!
'*Stiff-necked ones*,' well Esaias said!

XXVIII.

"So, Sabbath morning, out of gate
And on to way, what sees our arch
Good Farmer? Why, they hoist their freight—
The corpse—on shoulder, and so, march!
'*Now for it, Buti!*' In the nick
Of time 't is pully-hauly, hence
With hoarding! O'er the wayside quick
There 's Mary plain in evidence!

XXIX.

"And here 's the convoy halting: right!
O they are bent on howling psalms
And growling prayers, when opposite!
And yet they glance, for all their qualms,
Approve that promptitude of his,
The Farmer's—duly at his post
To take due thanks from every phyz,
Sour smirk—nay, surly smile almost!

XXX.

"Then earthward drops each brow again;
The solemn task 's resumed; they reach
Their holy field—the unholy train:
Enter its precinct, all and each,
Wrapt somehow in their godless rites;
Till, rites at end, up-waking, lo
They lift their faces! What delights
The mourners as they turn to go?

XXXI.

"Ha, ha, he, he! On just the side
They drew their purse-strings to make quit
Of Mary,—Christ the Crucified
Fronted them now—these biters bit!
Never was such a hiss and snort,
Such screwing nose and shooting lip!
Their purchase—honey in report—
Proved gall and verjuice at first sip!

XXXII.

"Out they break, on they bustle, where,
A-top of wall, the Farmer waits
With Buti: never fun so rare!
The Farmer has the best: he rates

The rascal, as the old High Priest
Takes on himself to sermonize—
Nay, sneer '*We Jews supposed, at least,*
Theft was a crime in Christian eyes!

XXXIII.

"'*Theft?*' cries the Farmer. '*Eat your words!*
Show me what constitutes a breach
Of faith in aught was said or heard!
I promised you in plainest speech
I'd take the thing you count disgrace
And put it here—and here 't is put!
Did you suppose I 'd leave the place
Blank, therefore, just your rage to glut?

XXXIV.

"'*I guess you dared not stipulate*
For such a damned impertinence!
So, quick, my greybeard, out of gate
And in at Ghetto! Haste you hence!
As long as I have house and land,
To spite you irreligious chaps
Here shall the Crucifixion stand—
Unless you down with cash, perhaps!'

XXXV.

"So snickered he and Buti both.
The Jews said nothing, interchanged
A glance or two, renewed their oath
To keep ears stopped and hearts estranged
From grace, for all our Church can do;
Then off they scuttle: sullen jog
Homewards, against our Church to brew
Fresh mischief in their synagogue.

XXXVI.

"But next day—see what happened, boy!
See why I bid you have a care
How you pelt Jews! The knaves employ
Such methods of revenge, forbear
No outrage on our faith, when free
To wreak their malice! Here they took
So base a method—plague o' me
If I record it in my Book!

XXXVII.

"For, next day, while the Farmer sat
Laughing with Buti, in his shop,
At their successful joke,—rat-tat,—
Door opens, and they 're like to drop

Down to the floor as in there stalks
A six-feet-high herculean-built
Young he-Jew with a beard that baulks
Description. '*Help ere blood be spilt!*'

XXXVIII.

—"Screamed Buti: for he recognized
Whom but the son, no less no more,
Of that High Priest his work surprised
So pleasantly the day before!
Son of the mother, then, whereof
The bier he lent a shoulder to,
And made the moans about, dared scoff
At sober Christian grief—the Jew!

XXXIX.

"'*Sirs, I salute you! Never rise!*
No apprehension!' (Buti, white
And trembling like a tub of size,
Had tried to smuggle out of sight
The picture's self—the thing in oils,
You know, from which a fresco's dashed
Which courage speeds while caution spoils)
'*Stay and be praised, sir, unabashed!*

XL.

"'*Praised,—ay, and paid too: for I come*
To buy that very work of yours.
My poor abode, which boasts—well, some
Few specimens of Art, secures
Haply, a masterpiece indeed
If I should find my humble means
Suffice the outlay. So, proceed!
Propose—ere prudence intervenes!'

XLI.

"On Buti, cowering like a child,
These words descended from aloft,
In tone so ominously mild,
With smile terrifically soft
To that degree—could Buti dare
(Poor fellow) use his brains, think twice?
He asked, thus taken unaware,
No more than just the proper price!

XLII.

"'*Done!*' cries the monster. '*I disburse*
Forthwith your moderate demand.
Count on my custom—if no worse
Your future work be, understand,

Than this I carry off! No aid!
My arm, sir, lacks nor bone nor thews:
The burden's easy, and we're made,
Easy or hard, to bear—we Jews!'

XLIII.

"Crossing himself at such escape,
Buti by turns the money eyes
And, timidly, the stalwart shape
Now moving doorwards; but, more wise,
The Farmer,—who, though dumb, this while
Had watched advantage,—straight conceived
A reason for that tone and smile
So mild and soft! The Jew—believed!

XLIV.

"Mary in triumph borne to deck
A Hebrew household! Pictured where
No one was used to bend the neck
In praise or bow the knee in prayer!
Borne to that domicile by whom?
The son of the High Priest! Through what?
An insult done his mother's tomb!
Saul changed to Paul—the case came pat!

XLV.

" '*Stay, dog-Jew . . . gentle sir, that is!*
Resolve me! Can it be, she crowned,—
Mary, by miracle,—Oh bliss!—
My present to your burial ground?
Certain, a ray of light has burst
Your veil of darkness! Had you else,
Only for Mary's sake, unpursed
So much hard money? Tell—oh, tell's!'

XLVI.

" Round—like a serpent that we took
For worm and trod on—turns his bulk
About the Jew. First dreadful look
Sends Buti in a trice to skulk
Out of sight somewhere, safe—alack!
But our good Farmer faith made bold:
And firm (with Florence at his back)
He stood, while gruff the gutturals rolled—

XLVII.

" '*Ay, sir, a miracle was worked,*
By quite another power, I trow,
Than ever yet in canvas lurked,
Or you would scarcely face me now!

A certain impulse did suggest
A certain grasp with this right-hand,
Which probably had put to rest
Our quarrel,—thus your throat once spanned!

XLVIII.

"'*But I remembered me, subdued*
That impulse, and you face me still!
And soon a philosophic mood
Succeeding (*hear it, if you will!*)
Has altogether changed my views
Concerning Art. Blind prejudice!
Well may you Christians tax us Jews
With scrupulosity too nice!

XLIX.

"'*For, don't I see,—let 's issue join!—*
Whenever I 'm allowed pollute
(*I—and my little bag of coin*)
Some Christian palace of repute,—
Don't I see stuck up everywhere
Abundant proof that cultured taste
Has Beauty for its only care,
And upon Truth no thought to waste?

L.

"'Jew, since it must be, take in pledge
Of payment '—*so a Cardinal*
Has sighed to me as if a wedge
Entered his heart—' this best of all
My treasures!' *Leda, Ganymede*
Or Antiope: swan, eagle, ape,
(*Or what's the beast of what 's the breed*)
And Jupiter in every shape!

LI.

"' *Whereat if I presume to ask*
'But, Eminence, though Titian's whisk
Of brush have well performed its task,
How comes it these false godships frisk
In presence of—what yonder frame
Pretends to image? Surely, odd
It seems, you let confront The Name
Each beast the heathen called his god!'

LII

"' *Benignant smiles me pity straight*
The Cardinal. ''T is Truth, we prize!
Art 's the sole question in debate!
These subjects are so many lies.

We treat them with a proper scorn
  When we turn lies—called gods forsooth—
To lies' fit use, now Christ is born.
  Drawing and colouring are Truth.

LIII.

"'Think you I honour lies so much
  As scruple to parade the charms
Of Leda—Titian, every touch—
  Because the thing within her arms
Means Jupiter who had the praise
  And prayer of a benighted world?
He would have mine too, if, in days
  Of light, I kept the canvas furled!'

LIV.

"'*So ending, with some easy gibe.*
  What power has logic! I, at once,
Acknowledged error in our tribe
  So squeamish that, when friends ensconce
A pretty picture in its niche
  To do us honour, deck our graves,
We fret and fume and have an itch
  To strangle folk—ungrateful knaves!

LV.

"'No, sir! Be sure that—what 's its style,
Your picture?—shall possess ungrudged
A place among my rank and file
Of Ledas and what not—be judged
Just as a picture! and (because
I fear me much I scarce have bought
A Titian) Master Buti's flaws
Found there, will have the laugh flaws ought!'

LVI.

"So, with a scowl, it darkens door—
This bulk—no longer! Buti makes
Prompt glad re-entry; there 's a score
Of oaths, as the good Farmer wakes
From what must needs have been a trance,
Or he had struck (he swears) to ground
The bold bad mouth that dared advance
Such doctrine the reverse of sound!

LVII.

"Was magic here? Most like! For, since,
Somehow our city's faith grows still
More and more lukewarm, and our Prince
Or loses heart or wants the will

To check increase of cold. 'T is '*Live*
And let live! Languidly repress
The Dissident! In short,—contrive
Christians must bear with Jews: no less!'

LVIII.

"The end seems, any Israelite
Wants any picture,—pishes, poohs,
Purchases, hangs it full in sight
In any chamber he may choose!
In Christ's crown, one more thorn we rue!
In Mary's bosom, one more sword!
No, boy, you must not pelt a Jew!
O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord?"

EPILOGUE.

μεστοὶ . . .
οἱ δ' ἀμφορῆς οἴνου μέλανος ἀνθοσμίου.

I.

"The poets pour us wine—"
Said the dearest poet I ever knew,
Dearest and greatest and best to me.
You clamour athirst for poetry—
We pour. "But when shall a vintage be"—
You cry—"strong grape, squeezed gold from screw,
Yet sweet juice, flavoured flowery-fine?
That were indeed the wine!"

II.

One pours your cup—stark strength,
Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp
Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood
Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!

For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;
Despatch it, then, in a single gulp!"
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
The liquor: stuff for strength.

III.

One pours your cup—sheer sweet,
The fragrant fumes of a year condensed:
Suspicion of all that 's ripe or rathe,
From the bud on branch to the grass in swathe.
"We suck mere milk of the seasons," saith
A curl of each nostril—"dew, dispensed
Nowise for nerving man to feat:
Boys sip such honeyed sweet!"

IV.

And thus who wants wine strong,
Waves each sweet smell of the year away;
Who likes to swoon as the sweets suffuse
His brain with a mixture of beams and dews
Turned syrupy drink—rough strength eschews:
"What though in our veins your wine-stock stay?
The lack of the bloom does our palate wrong.
Give us wine sweet, not strong!"

V.

Yet wine is—some affirm—
Prime wine is found in the world somewhere,
Of potable strength with sweet to match.
You double your heart its dose, yet catch—
As the draught descends—a violet-smatch,
Softness—however it came there,
Through drops expressed by the fire and worm:
Strong sweet wine—some affirm.

VI.

Body and bouquet both?
'T is easy to ticket a bottle so;
But what was the case in the cask, my friends?
Cask? Nay, the vat—where the maker mends
His strong with his sweet (you suppose) and blends
His rough with his smooth, till none can know
How it comes you may tipple, nothing loth,
Body and bouquet both.

VII.

"You" being just—the world.
No poets—who turn, themselves, the winch
Of the press; no critics—I 'll even say,
(Being flustered and easy of faith to-day)

Who for love of the work have learned the way
Till themselves produce home-made, at a pinch:
No! You are the world, and wine ne'er purled
Except to please the world!

VIII.

"For, oh the common heart!
And, ah the irremissible sin
Of poets who please themselves, not us!
Strong wine yet sweet wine pouring thus,
How please still—Pindar and Æschylus!—
Drink—dipt into by the bearded chin
Alike and the bloomy lip—no part
Denied the common heart!

IX.

"And might we get such grace,
And did you moderns but stock our vault
With the true half-brandy half-attar-gul,
How would seniors indulge at a hearty pull
While juniors tossed off their thimbleful!
Our Shakespeare and Milton escaped your fault,
So, they reign supreme o'er the weaker race
That wants the ancient grace!"

X.

If I paid myself with words
(As the French say well) I were dupe indeed!
I were found in belief that you quaffed and bowsed
At your Shakespeare the whole day long, caroused
In your Milton pottle-deep nor drowsed
A moment of night—toped on, took heed
Of nothing like modern cream-and-curds.
Pay me with deeds, not words!

XI.

For—see your cellarage!
There are forty barrels with Shakespeare's brand.
Some five or six are abroach: the rest
Stand spigoted, fauceted. Try and test
What yourselves call best of the very best!
How comes it that still untouched they stand?
Why don't you try tap, advance a stage
With the rest in cellarage?

XII.

For—see your cellarage!
There are four big butts of Milton's brew.
How comes it you make old drips and drops
Do duty, and there devotion stops?

Leave such an abyss of malt and hops
Embellied in butts which bungs still glue?
You hate your bard! A fig for your rage!
Free him from cellarage!

XIII.

'T is said I brew stiff drink,
But the deuce a flavour of grape is there.
Hardly a May-go-down, 't is just
A sort of a gruff Go-down-it-must—
No Merry-go-down, no gracious gust
Commingles the racy with Springtide's rare!
"What wonder," say you "that we cough, and blink
At Autumn's heady drink?"

XIV.

Is it a fancy, friends?
Mighty and mellow are never mixed,
Though mighty and mellow be born at once.
Sweet for the future,—strong for the nonce!
Stuff you should stow away, ensconce
In the deep and dark, to be found fast-fixed
At the century's close: such time strength spends
A-sweetening for my friends!

XV

And then—why, what you quaff
With a smack of lip and a cluck of tongue,
Is leakage and leavings—just what haps
From the tun some learned taster taps
With a promise "Prepare your watery chaps!
Here 's properest wine for old and young!
Dispute its perfection—you make us laugh!
Have faith, give thanks, but—quaff!"

XVI.

Leakage, I say, or—worse—
Leavings suffice pot-valiant souls.
Somebody, brimful, long ago,
Frothed flagon he drained to the dregs; and lo,
Down whisker and beard what an overflow!
Lick spilth that has trickled from classic jowls,
Sup the single scene, sip the only verse—
Old wine, not new and worse!

XVII.

I grant you: worse by much!
Renounce that new where you never gained
One glow at heart, one gleam at head,
And stick to the warrant of age instead!

No dwarf's-lap! Fatten, by giants fed!
You fatten, with oceans of drink undrained?
You feed—who would choke did a cobweb smutch
The Age you love so much?

XVIII.

A mine 's beneath a moor:
Acres of moor roof fathoms of mine
Which diamonds dot where you please to dig;
Yet who plies spade for the bright and big?
Your product is—truffles, you hunt with a pig!
Since bright-and-big, when a man would dine,
Suits badly: and therefore the Koh-i-noor
May sleep in mine 'neath moor!

XIX.

Wine, pulse in might from me!
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began—
God's gift to gladden the heart of man;
But spirit 's at proof, I promise that!
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage—mine for me.

XX.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
  Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who set it—his praise be my reward!
  Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's,
Let them "lay, pray, bray"—the addle-pates!
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!

XXI.

But someone says "Good Sir!"
  ('T is a worthy versed in what concerns
The making such labour turn out well)
"You don't suppose that the nosegay-smell
Needs always come from the grape? Each bell
  At your foot, each bud that your culture spurns,
The very cowslip would act like myrrh
On the stiffest brew—good Sir!

XXII.

"Cowslips, abundant birth
  O'er meadow and hillside, vineyard too,
—Like a schoolboy's scrawlings in and out
Distasteful lesson-book—all about

Greece and Rome, victory and rout—
  Love-verses instead of such vain ado!
So, fancies frolic it o'er the earth
Where thoughts have rightlier birth.

XXIII.

"Nay, thoughtlings they themselves:
  Loves, hates—in little and less and least!
Thoughts? '*What is a man beside a mount!*'
Loves? '*Absent—poor lovers the minutes count!*
Hates? '*Fie—Pope's letters to Martha Blount!*
  These furnish a wine for a children's-feast:
Insipid to man, they suit the elves
Like thoughts, loves, hates themselves."

XXIV.

And, friends, beyond dispute
  I too have the cowslips dewy and dear.
Punctual as Springtide forth peep they:
I leave them to make my meadow gay.
But I ought to pluck and impound them, eh?
  Not let them alone, but deftly shear
And shred and reduce to—what may suit
Children, beyond dispute?

XXV.

And, here 's May-month, all bloom,
All bounty: what if I sacrifice?
If I out with shears and shear, nor stop
Shearing till prostrate, lo, the crop?
And will you prefer it to ginger-pop
When I 've made you wine of the memories
Which leave as bare as a churchyard tomb
My meadow, late all bloom?

XXVI.

Nay, what ingratitude
Should I hesitate to amuse the wits
That have pulled so long at my flask, nor grudged
The headache that paid their pains, nor budged
From bunghole before they sighed and judged
"Too rough for our taste, to-day, befits
The racy and right when the years conclude!"
Out on ingratitude!

XXVII.

Grateful or ingrate—none,
No cowslip of all my fairy crew
Shall help to concoct what makes you wink
And goes to your head till you think you think!

I like them alive: the printer's ink
Would sensibly tell on the perfume too.
I may use up my nettles, ere I 've done;
But of cowslips—friends get none!

XXVIII.

Don't nettles make a broth
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.
My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste
On a tongue that 's fur and a palate—paste!
A magnum for friends who are sound! The sick—
I 'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,
Henceforward with nettle-broth!

LA SAISIAZ.

I.

Good, to forgive;
Best, to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
Soul, clap thy pinion!
Earth have dominion,
Body, o'er thee!

II.

Wander at will,
Day after day,—
Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber:
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

III.

Waft of soul's wing!
What lies above?
Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
Ferns of all feather,
Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

LA SAISIAZ.

1878.

A. E. S. September 14, 1877.

Dared and done: at last I stand upon the summit,
Dear and True!
Singly dared and done; the climbing both of us were
bound to do.
Petty feat and yet prodigious: every side my glance was
bent
O'er the grandeur and the beauty lavished through the
whole ascent.
Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and
now immense:
Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in
evidence!
And no berry in its hiding, no blue space in its out-
spread,

Pleaded to escape my footstep, challenged my emerging
head,
(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched
by shrub and tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn
set free,
Stationed face to face with—Nature? rather with Infini-
tude)
—No revealment of them all, as singly I my path
pursued,
But a bitter touched its sweetness, for the thought stung
"Even so
Both of us had loved and wondered just the same,
five days ago!"
Five short days, sufficient hardly to entice, from out its
den
Splintered in the slab, this pink perfection of the
cyclamen;
Scarce enough to heal and coat with amber gum the
sloe-tree's gash,
Bronze the clustered wilding apple, redden ripe the
mountain-ash:
Yet of might to place between us—Oh the barrier! Yon
Profound
Shrinks beside it, proves a pin-point: barrier this, with-
out a bound!

Boundless though it be, I reach you: somehow seem to
have you here
—Who are there. Yes, there you dwell now, plain the
four low walls appear;
Those are vineyards they enclose from; and the little
spire which points
—That 's Collonge, henceforth your dwelling. All the
same, howe'er disjoints
Past from present, no less certain you are here, not
there: have dared,
Done the feat of mountain-climbing,—five days since, we
both prepared
Daring, doing, arm in arm, if other help should haply
fail.
For you asked, as forth we sallied to see sunset from the
vale,
"Why not try for once the mountain,—take a foretaste,
snatch by stealth
Sight and sound, some unconsidered fragment of the
hoarded wealth?
Six weeks at its base, yet never once have we together
won
Sight or sound by honest climbing: let us two have
dared and done
Just so much of twilight journey as may prove to-
morrow's jaunt

Not the only mode of wayfare—wheeled to reach the eagle's haunt!"

So, we turned from the low grass-path you were pleased to call "your own,"

Set our faces to the rose-bloom o'er the summit's front of stone

Where Salève obtains, from Jura and the sunken sun she hides,

Due return of blushing "Good Night," rosy as a borne-off bride's,

For his masculine "Good Morrow" when, with sunrise still in hold,

Gay he hails her, and, magnific, thrilled her black length burns to gold.

Up and up we went, how careless—nay, how joyous! All was new,

All was strange. "Call progress toilsome? that were just insulting you!

How the trees must temper noontide! Ah, the thicket's sudden break!

What will be the morning glory, when at dusk thus gleams the lake?

Light by light puts forth Geneva: what a land—and, of the land,

Can there be a lovelier station than this spot where now we stand?

Is it late, and wrong to linger? True, to-morrow makes amends.
Toilsome progress? child's play, call it—specially when one descends!
There, the dread descent is over—hardly our adventure, though!
Take the vale where late we left it, pace the grass-path, 'mine,' you know!
Proud completion of achievement!" And we paced it, praising still
That soft tread on velvet verdure as it wound through hill and hill;
And at very end there met us, coming from Collonge, the pair
—All our people of the Chalet—two, enough and none to spare.
So, we made for home together, and we reached it as the stars
One by one came lamping—chiefly that prepotency of Mars—
And your last word was "I owe you this enjoyment!"—met with "Nay:
With yourself it rests to have a month of morrows like to-day!"
Then the meal, with talk and laughter, and the news of that rare nook

Yet untroubled by the tourist, touched on by no travel-book,
All the same—though latent—patent, hybrid birth of land and sea,
And (our travelled friend assured you)—if such miracle might be—
Comparable for completeness of both blessings—all around
Nature, and, inside her circle, safety from world's sight and sound—
Comparable to our Saisiaz. "Hold it fast and guard it well!
Go and see and vouch for certain, then come back and never tell
Living soul but us; and haply, prove our sky from cloud as clear,
There may we four meet, praise fortune just as now, another year!"

Thus you charged him on departure: not without the final charge
"Mind to-morrow's early meeting! We must leave our journey marge
Ample for the wayside wonders: there 's the stoppage at the inn
Three-parts up the mountain, where the hardships of the track begin;

There 's the convent worth a visit; but, the triumph
crowning all—
There 's Salève's own platform facing glory which strikes
greatness small,
—Blanc, supreme above his earth-brood, needles red
and white and green,
Horns of silver, fangs of crystal set on edge in his
demesne.
So, some three weeks since, we saw them: so, to-morrow
we intend
You shall see them likewise; therefore Good Night till
to-morrow, friend!"
Last, the nothings that extinguish embers of a vivid day:
"What might be the Marshal's next move, what Gam-
betta's counter-play?"
Till the landing on the staircase saw escape the latest
spark:
"Sleep you well!" "Sleep but as well, you!"—lazy
love quenched, all was dark.

Nothing dark next day at sundawn! Up I rose and
forth I fared:
Took my plunge within the bath-pool, pacified the
watch-dog scared,
Saw proceed the transmutation—Jura's black to one
gold glow,

Trod your level path that let me drink the morning deep
and slow,
Reached the little quarry—ravage recompensed by shrub
and fern—
Till the overflowing ardours told me time was for return.
So, return I did, and gaily. But, for once, from no far
mound
Waved salute a tall white figure. "Has her sleep been
so profound?
Foresight, rather, prudent saving strength for day's ex-
penditure!
Ay, the chamber-window 's open: out and on the terrace,
sure!"

No, the terrace showed no figure, tall, white, leaning
through the wreaths,
Tangle-twine of leaf and bloom that intercept the air one
breathes,
Interpose between one's love and Nature's loving, hill
and dale
Down to where the blue lake's wrinkle marks the river's
inrush pale
—Mazy Arve: whereon no vessel but goes sliding white
and plain,
Not a steamboat pants from harbour but one hears
pulsate amain,

Past the city's congregated peace of homes and pomp of spires
—Man's mild protest that there 's something more than Nature, man requires,
And that, useful as is Nature to attract the tourist's foot,
Quiet slow sure money-making proves the matter's very root,—
Need for body,—while the spirit also needs a comfort reached
By no help of lake or mountain, but the texts whence Calvin preached.
"Here 's the veil withdrawn from landscape: up to Jura and beyond,
All awaits us ranged and ready; yet she violates the bond,
Neither leans nor looks nor listens: why is this?" A turn of eye
Took the whole sole answer, gave the undisputed reason "why!"

This dread way you had your summons! No premonitory touch,
As you talked and laughed ('t is told me) scarce a minute ere the clutch
Captured you in cold forever. Cold? nay, warm you were as life

When I raised you, while the others used, in passionate
poor strife,
All the means that seemed to promise any aid, and all in
vain.
Gone you were, and I shall never see that earnest face
again
Grow transparent, grow transfigured with the sudden light
that leapt,
At the first word's provocation, from the heart-deeps
where it slept.

Therefore, paying piteous duty, what seemed You have
we consigned
Peacefully to—what I think were, of all earth-beds, to
your mind
Most the choice for quiet, yonder: low walls stop the
vines' approach,
Lovingly Salève protects you; village-sports will ne'er
encroach
On the stranger lady's silence, whom friends bore so kind
and well
Thither "just for love's sake,"—such their own word was:
and who can tell?
You supposed that few or none had known and loved
you in the world:

May be! flower that 's full-blown tempts the butterfly,
not flower that 's furled.
But more learned sense unlocked you, loosed the sheath
and let expand
Bud to bell and outspread flower-shape at the least warm
touch of hand
—Maybe, throb of heart, beneath which,—quickening
farther than it knew,—
Treasure oft was disembosomed, scent all strange and
unguessed hue.
Disembosomed, re-embosomed,—must one memory suf-
fice,
Prove I knew an Alpine-rose which all beside named
Edelweiss?

Rare thing, red or white, you rest now: two days slum-
bered through; and since
One day more will see me rid of this same scene whereat
I wince,
Tetchy at all sights and sounds and pettish at each idle
charm
Proffered me who pace now singly where we two went
arm in arm,—
I have turned upon my weakness: asked "And what,
forsooth, prevents
That, this latest day allowed me, I fulfil of her intents

One she had the most at heart—that we should thus again survey
From Salève Mont Blanc together? " Therefore,—dared and done to-day
Climbing,—here I stand: but you—where?

If a spirit of the place
Broke the silence, bade me question, promised answer,—what disgrace
Did I stipulate " Provided answer suit my hopes, not fears! "
Would I shrink to learn my life-time's limit—days, weeks, months or years?
Would I shirk assurance on each point whereat I can but guess—
" Does the soul survive the body? Is there God's self, no or yes? "
If I know my mood, 't were constant—come in whatsoe'er uncouth
Shape it should, nay, formidable—so the answer were but truth.

Well, and wherefore shall it daunt me, when 't is I myself am tasked,
When, by weakness weakness questioned, weakly answers —weakly asked?

Weakness never needs be falseness: truth is truth in each degree
—Thunderpealed by God to Nature, whispered by my soul to me.
Nay, the weakness turns to strength and triumphs in a truth beyond:
"Mine is but man's truest answer—how were it did God respond?"
I shall no more dare to mimic such response in futile speech,
Pass off human lisp as echo of the sphere-song out of reach,
Than,—because it well may happen yonder, where the far snows blanch
Mute Mont Blanc, that who stands near them sees and hears an avalanche,—
I shall pick a clod and throw,—cry "Such the sight and such the sound!
What though I nor see nor hear them? Others do, the proofs abound!"
Can I make my eye an eagle's, sharpen ear to recognize
Sound o'er league and league of silence? Can I know, who but surmise?
If I dared no self-deception when, a week since, I and you

Walked and talked along the grass-path, passing lightly in review
What seemed hits and what seemed misses in a certain fence-play,—strife
Sundry minds of mark engaged in "On the Soul and Future Life,"—
If I ventured estimating what was come of parried thrust,
Subtle stroke, and, rightly, wrongly, estimating could be just
—Just, though life so seemed abundant in the form which moved by mine,
I might well have played at feigning, fooling,—laughed "What need opine
Pleasure must succeed to pleasure, else past pleasure turns to pain,
And this first life claims a second, else I count its good no gain?"—
Much less have I heart to palter when the matter to decide
Now becomes "Was ending ending once and always, when you died?"
Did the face, the form I lifted as it lay, reveal the loss
Not alone of life but soul? A tribute to yon flowers and moss,

What of you remains beside? A memory! Easy to attest
"Certainly from out the world that one believes who knew her best
Such was good in her, such fair, which fair and good were great perchance
Had but fortune favoured, bidden each shy faculty advance;
After all—who knows another? Only as I know, I speak."
So much of you lives within me while I live my year or week.
Then my fellow takes the tale up, not unwilling to aver
Duly in his turn "I knew him best of all, as he knew her:
Such he was, and such he was not, and such other might have been
But that somehow every actor, somewhere in this earthly scene,
Fails." And so both memories dwindle, yours and mine together linked,
Till there is but left for comfort, when the last spark proves extinct,
This—that somewhere new existence led by men and women new

Possibly attains perfection coveted by me and you;
While ourselves, the only witness to what work our life evolved,
Only to ourselves proposing problems proper to be solved
By ourselves alone,—who working ne'er shall know if work bear fruit
Others reap and garner, heedless how produced by stalk and root,—
We who, darkling, timed the day's birth,—struggling, testified to peace,—
Earned, by dint of failure, triumph,—we, creative thought, must cease
In created word, thought's echo, due to impulse long since sped!
Why repine? There 's ever someone lives although ourselves be dead!

Well, what signifies repugnance? Truth is truth howe'er it strike.
Fair or foul the lot apportioned life on earth, we bear alike.
Stalwart body idly yoked to stunted spirit, powers, that fain
Else would soar, condemned to grovel, groundlings through the fleshly chain,—

Help that hinders, hindrance proved but help disguised
when all too late,—
Hindrance is the fact acknowledged, howsoe'er explained
as Fate,
Fortune, Providence: we bear, own life a burthen more
or less.
Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happi-
ness
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we
count
Life a curse and not a blessing, summed-up in its whole
amount,
Help and hindrance, joy and sorrow?
Why should I want courage here?
I will ask and have an answer,—with no favour, with no
fear,—
From myself. How much, how little, do I inwardly
believe
True that controverted doctrine? Is it fact to which I
cleave,
Is it fancy I but cherish, when I take upon my
lips
Phrase the solemn Tuscan fashioned, and declare the
soul's eclipse
Not the soul's extinction? take his "I believe and I
declare—

Certain am I—from this life I pass into a better, there
Where that lady lives of whom enamoured was my soul" —where this
Other lady, my companion dear and true, she also is?

I have questioned and am answered. Question, answer presuppose
Two points: that the thing itself which questions, answers,—*is*, it knows;
As it also knows the thing perceived outside itself,—a force
Actual ere its own beginning, operative through its course,
Unaffected by its end,—that this thing likewise needs must be;
Call this—God, then, call that—soul, and both—the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? that they o'erpass my power of proving, proves them such:
Fact it is I know I know not something which is fact as much.
What before caused all the causes, what effect of all effects
Haply follows,—these are fancy. Ask the rush if it suspects

Whence and how the stream which floats it had a rise,
and where and how
Falls or flows on still! What answer makes the rush
except that now
Certainly it floats and is, and, no less certain than
itself,
Is the everyway external stream that now through shoal
and shelf
Floats it onward, leaves it—may be—wrecked at last, or
lands on shore
There to root again and grow and flourish stable
evermore.
—May be! mere surmise not knowledge: much con-
jecture styled belief,
What the rush conceives the stream means through the
voyage blind and brief.
Why, because I doubtless am, shall I as doubtless be?
"Because
God seems good and wise." Yet under this our life's
apparent laws
Reigns a wrong which, righted once, would give quite
other laws to life.
"He seems potent." Potent here, then: why are right
and wrong at strife?
Has in life the wrong the better? Happily life ends so
soon!

Right predominates in life? Then why two lives and double boon?
"Anyhow, we want it: wherefore want?" Because, without the want,
Life, now human, would be brutish: just that hope, however scant,
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope therein away,
All we have to do is surely not endure another day.
This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that promise joy: life done—
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete fulfilment? none.
"But the soul is not the body:" and the breath is not the flute;
Both together make the music: either marred and all is mute.
Truce to such old sad contention whence, according as we shape
Most of hope or most of fear, we issue in a half-escape:
"We believe" is sighed. I take the cup of comfort proffered thus,
Taste and try each soft ingredient, sweet infusion, and discuss

What their blending may accomplish for the cure of
doubt, till—slow,
Sorrowful, but how decided! needs must I o'erturn it—so!
Cause before, effect behind me—blanks! The midway
point I am,
Caused, itself—itself efficient: in that narrow space
must cram
All experience—out of which there crowds conjecture
manifold,
But, as knowledge, this comes only—things may be as I
behold,
Or may not be, but, without me and above me, things
there are;
I myself am what I know not—ignorance which proves
no bar
To the knowledge that I am, and, since I am, can
recognize
What to me is pain and pleasure: this is sure, the rest—
surmise.
If my fellows are or are not, what may please them and
what pain,—
Mere surmise: my own experience—that is knowledge,
once again!

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated,
learnt and taught

This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,
If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probation-space,
Mine, for me. But those apparent other mortals—theirs, for them?
Knowledge stands on my experience: all outside its narrow hem,
Free surmise may sport and welcome! Pleasures, pains affect mankind
Just as they affect myself? Why, here 's my neighbour colour-blind,
Eyes like mine to all appearance: "green as grass" do I affirm?
"Red as grass" he contradicts me: which employs the proper term?
Were we two the earth's sole tenants, with no third for referee,
How should I distinguish? Just so, God must judge 'twixt man and me.

To each mortal peradventure earth becomes a new
machine,
Pain and pleasure no more tally in our sense than red
and green;
Still, without what seems such mortal's pleasure, pain,
my life were lost
—Life, my whole sole chance to prove—although at
man's apparent cost—
What is beauteous and what ugly, right to strive for,
right to shun,
Fit to help and fit to hinder,—prove my forces everyone,
Good and evil,—learn life's lesson, hate of evil, love of
good,
As 't is set me, understand so much as may be under-
stood—
Solve the problem: "From thine apprehended scheme
of things, deduce
Praise or blame of its contriver, shown a niggard or
profuse
In each good or evil issue! nor miscalculate alike
Counting one the other in the final balance, which to
strike,
Soul was born and life allotted: ay, the show of things
unfurled
For thy summing-up and judgment,—thine, no other
mortal's world!"

What though fancy scarce may grapple with the complex and immense
—"His own world for every mortal?" Postulate omnipotence!
Limit power, and simple grows the complex: shrunk to atom size,
That which loomed immense to fancy low before my reason lies,—
I survey it and pronounce it work like other work: success
Here and there, the workman's glory,—here and there, his shame no less,
Failure as conspicuous. Taunt not "Human work ape work divine?"
As the power, expect performance! God's be God's as mine is mine!
God whose power made man and made man's wants, and made, to meet those wants,
Heaven and earth which, through the body, prove the spirit's ministrants,
Excellently all,—did He lack power or was the will in fault
When He let blue heaven be shrouded o'er by vapours of the vault,
Gay earth drop her garlands shrivelled at the first infecting breath

Of the serpent pains which herald, swarming in, the
dragon death?
What, no way but this that man may learn and lay to
heart how rife
Life were with delights would only death allow their
taste to life?
Must the rose sigh "Pluck—I perish!" must the eve
weep "Gaze—I fade!"
—Every sweet warn "'Ware my bitter!" every shine bid
"Wait my shade"?
Can we love but on condition, that the thing we love
must die?
Needs there groan a world in anguish just to teach us
sympathy—
Multitudinously wretched that we, wretched too, may guess
What a preferable state were universal happiness?
Hardly do I so conceive the outcome of that power
which went
To the making of the worm there in yon clod its
tenement,
Any more than I distinguish aught of that which, wise
and good,
Framed the leaf, its plain of pasture, dropped the dew,
its fineless food.
Nay, were fancy fact, were earth and all it holds illusion
mere,

Only a machine for teaching love and hate and hope and fear
To myself, the sole existence, single truth mid falsehood, —well!
If the harsh throes of the prelude die not off into the swell
Of that perfect piece they sting me to become a-strain for,—if
Roughness of the long rock-clamber lead not to the last of cliff,
First of level country where is sward my pilgrim-foot can prize,—
Plainlier! if this life's conception new life fail to realize,—
Though earth burst and proved a bubble glassing hues of hell, one huge
Reflex of the devil's doings—God's work by no subterfuge—
(So death's kindly touch informed me as it broke the glamour, gave
Soul and body both release from life's long nightmare in the grave)
Still,—with no more Nature, no more Man as riddle to be read,
Only my own joys and sorrows now to reckon real instead,—

I must say—or choke in silence—" Howsoever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise,—life well weighed,—preponderate."
By necessity ordained thus? I shall bear as best I can;
By a cause all-good, all-wise, all-potent? No, as I am man!
Such were God: and was it goodness that the good within my range
Or had evil in admixture or grew evil's self by change?
Wisdom—that becoming wise meant making slow and sure advance
From a knowledge proved in error to acknowledged ignorance?
Power? 't is just the main assumption reason most revolts at! power
Unavailing for bestowment on its creature of an hour,
Man, of so much proper action rightly aimed and reaching aim,
So much passion,—no defect there, no excess, but still the same,—
As what constitutes existence, pure perfection bright as brief
For yon worm, man's fellow-creature, on yon happier world—its leaf!
No, as I am man, I mourn the poverty I must impute:

Goodness, wisdom, power, all bounded, each a human attribute!

But, O world outspread beneath me! only for myself I speak,
Nowise dare to play the spokesman for my brothers strong and weak,
Full and empty, wise and foolish, good and bad, in every age,
Every clime, I turn my eyes from, as in one or other stage
Of a torture writhe they, Job-like couched on dung and crazed with blains
—Wherefore? whereto? ask the whirlwind what the dread voice thence explains!
I shall "vindicate no way of God's to man," nor stand apart,
"Laugh, be candid!" while I watch it traversing the human heart.
Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on: no less
Mine results in "Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts

Gain about to be. For at what moment did I so advance
Near to knowledge as when frustrate of escape from ignorance?
Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
Rule, and truth seem more than ever potent because falsehood reigned?
While for love—Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed
By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed?
Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup unspilled,
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop distilled,
I shall boast it mine—the balsam, bless each kindly wrench that wrung
From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence pleasure sprung,
Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the berry, left all grace
Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place!

Witness, Dear and True, how little I was 'ware of—not your worth

—That I knew, my heart assures me—but of what a shade on earth
Would the passage from my presence of the tall white figure throw
O'er the ways we walked together! Somewhat narrow, somewhat slow
Used to seem the ways, the walking: narrow ways are well to tread
When there 's moss beneath the footstep, honeysuckle overhead:
Walking slow to beating bosom surest solace soonest gives,
Liberates the brain o'erloaded—best of all restoratives.
Nay, do I forget the open vast where soon or late converged
Ways though winding?—world-wide heaven-high sea where music slept or surged
As the angel had ascendant, and Beethoven's Titan mace
Smote the immense to storm Mozart would by a finger's lifting chase?
Yes, I knew—but not with knowledge such as thrills me while I view
Yonder precinct which henceforward holds and hides the Dear and True.

Grant me (once again) assurance we shall each meet
each some day,
Walk—but with how bold a footstep! on a way—but
what a way!
—Worst were best, defeat were triumph, utter loss were
utmost gain.
Can it be, and must, and will it?

Silence! Out of fact's domain,
Just surmise prepared to mutter hope, and also fear—
dispute
Fact's inexorable ruling "Outside fact, surmise be mute!"
Well!
Ay, well and best, if fact's self I may force the
answer from!
'T is surmise I stop the mouth of. Not above in yonder
dome
All a rapture with its rose-glow,—not around, where pile
and peak
Strainingly await the sun's fall,—not beneath, where
crickets creak,
Birds assemble for their bed-time, soft the tree-top swell
subsides,—
No, nor yet within my deepest sentient self the know-
ledge hides.
Aspiration, reminiscence, plausibilities of trust

—Now the ready "Man were wronged else," now the rash
"and God unjust"—
None of these I need. Take thou, my soul, thy solitary stand,
Umpire to the champions Fancy, Reason, as on either hand
Amicable war they wage and play the foe in thy behoof!
Fancy thrust and Reason parry! Thine the prize who stand aloof.

FANCY.

I concede the thing refused: henceforth no certainty more plain
Than this mere surmise that after body dies soul lives again.
Two, the only facts acknowledged late, are now increased to three—
God is, and the soul is, and, as certain, after death shall be.
Put this third to use in life, the time for using fact!

REASON.

I do:
Find it promises advantage, coupled with the other two.

Life to come will be improvement on the life that 's now ;
destroy
Body's thwartings, there 's no longer screen betwixt soul
and soul's joy.
Why should we expect new hindrance, novel tether? In
this first
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at
worst :
Since time means amelioration, tardily enough dis-
played,
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retro-
grade.
We know more though we know little, we grow stronger
though still weak,
Partly see though all too purblind, stammer though we
cannot speak.
There is no such grudge in God as scared the ancient
Greek, no fresh
Substitute of trap for dragnet, once a breakage in the
mesh.
Dragons were, and serpents are, and blindworms will be :
ne'er emerged
Any new-created python for man's plague since earth was
purged.
Failing proof, then, of invented trouble to replace the
old,

O'er this life the next presents advantage much and manifold:
Which advantage—in the absence of a fourth and farther fact
Now conceivably surmised, of harm to follow from the act—
I pronounce for man's obtaining at this moment. Why delay?
Is he happy? happiness will change: anticipate the day!
Is he sad? there 's ready refuge: of all sadness death 's prompt cure!
Is he both, in mingled measure? cease a burthen to endure!
Pains with sorry compensations, pleasures stinted in the dole,
Power that sinks and pettiness that soars, all halved and nothing whole,
Idle hopes that lure man onward, forced back by as idle fears—
What a load he stumbles under through his glad sad seventy years,
When a touch sets right the turmoil, lifts his spirit where, flesh-freed,
Knowledge shall be rightly named so, all that seems be truth indeed!

Grant his forces no accession, nay, no faculty's increase,
Only let what now exists continue, let him prove in peace
Power whereof the interrupted unperfected play enticed
Man through darkness, which to lighten any spark of hope sufficed,—
What shall then deter his dying out of darkness into light?
Death itself perchance, brief pain that 's pang, condensed and infinite?
But at worst, he needs must brave it one day, while, at best, he laughs—
Drops a drop within his chalice, sleep not death his science quaffs!
Any moment claims more courage when, by crossing cold and gloom,
Manfully man quits discomfort, makes for the provided room
Where the old friends want their fellow, where the new acquaintance wait,
Probably for talk assembled, possibly to sup in state!
I affirm and re-affirm it therefore: only make as plain
As that man now lives, that, after dying, man will live again,—
Make as plain the absence, also, of a law to contravene

Voluntary passage from this life to that by change of scene,—
And I bid him—at suspicion of first cloud athwart his sky,
Flower's departure, frost's arrival—never hesitate, but die!

FANCY.

Then I double my concession: grant, along with new life sure,
This same law found lacking now: ordain that, whether rich or poor
Present life is judged in aught man counts advantage—be it hope,
Be it fear that brightens, blackens most or least his horoscope,—
He, by absolute compulsion such as made him live at all,
Go on living to the fated end of life whate'er befall.
What though, as on earth he darkling grovels, man descry the sphere,
Next life's—call it, heaven of freedom, close above and crystal-clear?
He shall find—say, hell to punish who in aught curtails the term,
Fain would act the butterfly before he has played out the worm.

God, soul, earth, heaven, hell,—five facts now: what is to desiderate?

REASON.

Nothing! Henceforth man's existence bows to the monition "Wait!

Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme concern!

Living here means nescience simply: 't is next life that helps to learn.

Shut those eyes, next life will open,—stop those ears, next life will teach

Hearing's office,—close those lips, next life will give the power of speech!

Or, if action more amuse thee than the passive attitude,

Bravely bustle through thy being, busy thee for ill or good,

Reap this life's success or failure! Soon shall things be unperplexed

And the right and wrong, now tangled, lie unravelled in the next."

FANCY.

Not so fast! Still more concession! not alone do I declare

Life must needs be borne,—I also will that man become aware
Life has worth incalculable. every moment that he spends
So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life depends.
Good, done here, be there rewarded,—evil, worked here, there amerced!
Six facts now, and all established, plain to man the last as first.

REASON.

There was good and evil, then, defined to man by this decree?
Was—for at its promulgation both alike have ceased to be.
Prior to this last announcement "Certainly as God exists,
As He made man's soul, as soul is quenchless by the deathly mists,
Yet is, all the same, forbidden premature escape from time
To eternity's provided purer air and brighter clime,—
Just so certainly depends it on the use to which man turns

Earth, the good or evil done there, whether after death he earns
Life eternal,—heaven, the phrase be, or eternal death,—say, hell.
As his deeds, so proves his portion, doing ill or doing well "
—Prior to this last announcement, earth was man's probation-place:
Liberty of doing evil gave his doing good a grace;
Once lay down the law, with Nature's simple "Such effects succeed
Causes such, and heaven or hell depends upon man's earthly deed
Just as surely as depends the straight or else the crooked line
On his making point meet point or with or else without incline,"—
Thenceforth neither good nor evil does man, doing what he must.
Lay but down that law as stringent "Wouldst thou live again, be just!"
As this other "Wouldst thou live now, regularly draw thy breath!
For, suspend the operation, straight law's breach results in death—"
And (provided always, man, addressed this mode, be sound and sane)

Prompt and absolute obedience, never doubt, will law obtain!
Tell not me "Look round us! nothing each side but acknowledged law,
Now styled God's—now, Nature's edict!" Where 's obedience without flaw
Paid to either? What 's the adage rife in man's mouth? Why, "The best
I both see and praise, the worst I follow"—which, despite professed
Seeing, praising, all the same he follows, since he disbelieves
In the heart of him that edict which for truth his head receives.
There 's evading and persuading and much making law amends
Somehow, there 's the nice distinction 'twixt fast foes and faulty friends,
—Any consequence except inevitable death when "Die,
Whoso breaks our law!" they publish, God and Nature equally.
Law that 's kept or broken—subject to man's will and pleasure! Whence?
How comes law to bear eluding? Not because of impotence:
Certain laws exist already which to hear means to obey;

Therefore not without a purpose these man must, while those man may
Keep and, for the keeping, haply gain approval and reward.
Break through this last superstructure, all is empty air—no sward
Firm like my first fact to stand on "God there is, and soul there is,"
And soul's earthly life-allotment: wherein, by hypothesis,
Soul is bound to pass probation, prove its powers, and exercise
Sense and thought on fact, and then, from fact educing fit surmise,
Ask itself, and of itself have solely answer, "Does the scope
Earth affords of fact to judge by warrant future fear or hope?"

Thus have we come back full circle: fancy's footsteps one by one
Go their round conducting reason to the point where they begun,
Left where we were left so lately, Dear and True! When, half a week
Since, we walked and talked and thus I told you, how suffused a cheek

You had turned me had I sudden brought the blush into
the smile
By some word like "Idly argued! you know better all
the while!"
Now, from me—Oh not a blush but, how much more,
a joyous glow,
Laugh triumphant, would it strike did your "Yes, better
I do know"
Break, my warrant for assurance! which assurance may
not be
If, supplanting hope, assurance needs must change this
life to me.
So, I hope—no more than hope, but hope—no less than
hope, because
I can fathom, by no plumb-line sunk in life's apparent
laws,
How I may in any instance fix where change should
meetly fall
Nor involve, by one revisal, abrogation of them
all:
—Which again involves as utter change in life thus law-
released,
Whence the good of goodness vanished when the ill of
evil ceased.
Whereas, life and laws apparent re-instated,—all we
know,

All we know not,—o'er our heaven again cloud closes, until, lo—
Hope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to pierce its gloom, compelled
By a power and by a purpose which, if no one else beheld,
I behold in life, so—hope!

Sad summing-up of all to say!
Athanasius contra mundum, why should he hope more than they?
So are men made notwithstanding, such magnetic virtue darts
From each head their fancy haloes to their unresisting hearts!

Here I stand, methinks a stone's throw from yon village I this morn
Traversed for the sake of looking one last look at its forlorn
Tenement's ignoble fortune: through a crevice, plain its floor
Piled with provender for cattle, while a dung-heap blocked the door.
In that squalid Bossex, under that obscene red roof, arose,

Like a fiery flying serpent from its egg, a soul—
Rousseau's.
Turn thence! Is it Diodati joins the glimmer of the
lake?
There I plucked a leaf, one week since,—ivy, plucked
for Byron's sake.
Famed unfortunates! And yet, because of that phos-
phoric fame
Swathing blackness' self with brightness till putridity
looked flame,
All the world was witched: and wherefore? what could
lie beneath, allure
Heart of man to let corruption serve man's head as cyno-
sure?
Was the magic in the dictum "All that 's good is gone
and past;
Bad and worse still grows the present, and the worst of
all comes last:
Which believe—for I believe it?" So preached one his
gospel-news;
While melodious moaned the other "Dying day with
dolphin-hues!
Storm, for loveliness and darkness like a woman's eye!
Ye mounts
Where I climb to 'scape my fellow, and thou sea wherein
he counts

Not one inch of vile dominion! What were your especial worth
Failed ye to enforce the maxim 'Of all objects found on earth
Man is meanest, much too nonoured when compared with—what by odds
Beats him—any dog: so, let him go a-howling to his gods!'
Which believe—for I believe it!" such the comfort man received
Sadly since perforce he must: for why? the famous bard believed!

Fame! Then, give me fame, a moment! As I gather at a glance
Human glory after glory vivifying yon expanse,
Let me grasp them all together, hold on high and brandish well
Beacon-like above the rapt world ready, whether heaven or hell
Send the dazzling summons earthward, to submit itself the same,
Take on trust the hope or else despair flashed full on face by—Fame!
Thanks, thou pine-tree of Makistos, wide thy giant torch I wave!

Know ye whence I plucked the pillar, late with sky for
architrave?
This the trunk, the central solid Knowledge, kindled core,
began
Tugging earth-deeps, trying heaven-heights, rooted yonder
at Lausanne.
This which flits and spits, the aspic,—sparkles in and out
the boughs
Now, and now condensed, the python, coiling round and
round allows
Scarce the bole its due effulgence, dulled by flake on
flake of Wit—
Laughter so bejewels Learning,—what but Ferney
nourished it?
Nay, nor fear—since every resin feeds the flame—that I
dispense
With yon Bossex terebinth-tree's all-explosive Elo-
quence:
No, be sure! nor, any more than thy resplendency, Jean-
Jacques,
Dare I want thine, Diodati! What though monkeys and
macaques
Gibber "Byron"? Byron's ivy rears a branch beyond
the crew,
Green for ever, no deciduous trash macaques and mon-
keys chew!

As Rousseau, then, eloquent, as Byron prime in poet's
power,—
Detonations, fulgurations, smiles—the rainbow, tears—
the shower,—
Lo, I lift the coruscating marvel—Fame! and, famed,
declare
—Learned for the nonce as Gibbon, witty as wit's self
Voltaire . . .
O the sorriest of conclusions to whatever man of sense
Mid the millions stands the unit, takes no flare for
evidence!
Yet the millions have their portion, live their calm or
troublous day,
Find significance in fireworks: so, by help of mine, they
may
Confidently lay to heart and lock in head their life long
—this:
"He there with the brand flamboyant, broad o'er night's
forlorn abyss,
Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding, with Wit's
bauble, Learning's rod . . .
Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure
of God.

So the poor smile played, that evening: pallid smile long since extinct
Here in London's mid-November! Not so loosely thoughts were linked,
Six weeks since as I, descending in the sunset from Salève,
Found the chain, I seemed to forge there, flawless till it reached your grave,—
Not so filmy was the texture, but I bore it in my breast
Safe thus far. And since I found a something in me would not rest
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of the chain,
—Here it lies, for much or little! I have lived all o'er again
That last pregnant hour: I saved it, just as I could save a root
Disinterred for re-interment when the time best helps to shoot.
Life is stocked with germs of torpid life; but may I never wake
Those of mine whose resurrection could not be without earthquake!
Rest all such, unraised forever! Be this, sad yet sweet, the sole
Memory evoked from slumber! Least part this: then what the whole?

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

I.

Such a starved bank of moss
  Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
  Violets were born!

II.

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
  Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud
  Splendid, a star!

III.

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

1878.

I.

"FAME!" Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was,—how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendidest—a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II.

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed!
Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed

Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,
As redly up and out and off they reeled
Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III.

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used,—
You now, in childish days or rather nights,—
As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
By that old nurse-taught game which gave the sprites
Each one his title and career,—confused
Belief 't was all long over with the flights
From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV.

New long bright life! and happy chance befell—
That I know—when some prematurely lost
Child of disaster bore away the bell
From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
Never before my chimney broke the spell!
Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost,
While—never mind Who was it cumbered earth—
Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V.

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with—ask the chloride's name
From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass
Its life, I thought was fed on copperas.

VI.

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
The style and prowess of that purple one?
Who is the hero other eyes shall see
Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun—
Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
O' the coal,—as Job and Hebrew name a spark,—
What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII.

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours
The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent powers

Constellate proudly,—swords, scrolls, harps, that fill
The vulgar eye to surfeit,—found best flowers
Hid deepest in the dark,—named unplucked grace
Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII.

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
Oh and I bid thee,—to whom fortune doled
Scantly all other gifts out—bicker blue,
Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.

IX.

No! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere
Stripling's amusement: manhood's sport be grave!
Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,
Their boldness and their brightness could not save
(In some old night of time on some lone drear
Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave)
—Save from ignoble exit into smoke,
Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke!

X.

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift
In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,
We both know well! Where uncouth tribes made shift
Long since to just keep life in, billows dash
Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift
Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash
Though they have built the serviceable town
Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI.

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub
To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts
Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub
The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts
Their promontory's breadth with salt: all stub
Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife
To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII.

And what life! Here was, from the world to choose,
The Druids' chosen chief of homes: they reared
—Only their women,—mid the slush and ooze
Of yon low islet,—to their sun, revered

In strange stone guise,—a temple. May-dawn dews
Saw the old structure levelled; when there peered
May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more
Up towered the new pile perfect as before:

XIII.

Seeing that priestesses—and all were such—
Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,
Each alike helping—well, if not too much!
For, mid their eagerness to outstrip day
And get work done, if any loosed her clutch
And let a single stone drop, straight a prey
Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,
By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

XIV.

And still so much remains of that grey cult,
That even now, of nights, do women steal
To the sole Menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic church-spire by appeal
To power discrowned in vain, since each adult
Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal
Whatever plague no priestly help can cure:
Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure!

XV.

Nay more: on May-morns, that primeval rite
Of temple-building, with its punishment
For rash precipitation, lingers, spite
Of all remonstrance; vainly are they shent,
Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,
Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent:
Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs
From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs.

XVI.

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door
Sing unintelligible words to tunes
As obsolete: "scraps of Druidic lore,"
Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes
Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.
Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes!
They serve my purpose, which is but to show
Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII.

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there
By fancy from the log that ends its days
Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,
On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze

We two crouch round so closely, bidding care
Keep outside with the snow-storm? Something says
"Fit time for story-telling!" I begin—
Why not at Croisic, port we first put in?

XVIII.

Anywhere serves: for point me out the place
Wherever man has made himself a home,
And there I find the story of our race
In little, just at Croisic as at Rome.
What matters the degree? the kind I trace.
Druids their temple, Christians have their dome:
So with mankind; and Croisic, I 'll engage,
With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX.

No doubt, men vastly differ: and we need
Some strange exceptional benevolence
Of nature's sunshine to develop seed
So well, in the less-favoured clime, that thence
We may discern how shrub means tree indeed
Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.
Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks
With beasts or gods: stove-forced, give warmth the thanks!

XX.

While, is there any ice-checked? Such shall learn
I am thankworthy, who propose to slake
His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn
Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake
No memories of what is harsh and stern
In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake
The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps
Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps.

XXI.

Take these two, see, each outbreak,—spirt and spirt
Of fire from our brave billet's either edge
Which—call maternal Croisic ocean-girt!
These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.
One flames fierce gules, its feebler rival—vert,
Heralds would tell you: heroes, I allege,
They both were: soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,
Lawyers, physicians—guess what gods or beasts!

XXII.

None of them all, but—poets, if you please!
"What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,
Did two among the aborigines
Of that rough region pass the ungracious time

Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,
The songs forbidden a serener clime?
Or had they universal audience—that 's
To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz?"

XXIII.

Open your ears! Each poet in his day
Had such a mighty moment of success
As pinnacled him straight, in full display,
For the whole world to worship—nothing less!
Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray?
And did not Paris, for one moment—yes,
Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,
One at a time, a century between?

XXIV.

And yet you never heard their names! Assist,
Clio, Historic Muse, while I record
Great deeds! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist
And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord
Of day, one moment! Hear the annalist
Tell a strange story, true to the least word!
At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten
Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV.

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme
—Appropriate appellation! noble birth
And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom
Was "Better do than say"! In Croisic's dearth
Why prison his career while Christendom
Lay open to reward acknowledged worth?
He therefore left it at the proper age
And got to be the Prince of Condé's page.

XXVI.

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called "The Duke,"
—Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,
(As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,
Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,
Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could look
For issue)—failing Louis of so rare
A godsend, it was natural the Prince
Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor wince.

XXVII.

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth
Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump almost
To bursting,—would the brothers, childless both,
Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost—

Condé, called "Duke" and "Next King," nothing loth
Awaited his appointment to the post,
And wiled away the time, as best he might,
Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII.

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn
From cities where a whisper breeds offence,
He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn
Testify to first stir of Providence;
And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,
There wanted not a poet to dispense
Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,
Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX.

A poet born and bred, his very sire
A poet also, author of a piece
Printed and published, "Ladies—their attire":
Therefore the son, just born at his decease,
Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,
And kept it, yielding moderate increase
Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much
Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

XXX.

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind!)
Rubbish not wholly without value, though,
Being to compliment the Duke designed
And bring the complimenter credit so,—
Pleasure with profit happily combined.
Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till—lo,
This happened, as he sat in an alcove
Elaborating rhyme for "love"—*not* "dove."

XXXI.

He was alone: silence and solitude
Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,
Nature—not our new picturesque and rude,
But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground—
Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued
With these, he sat absorbed in one profound
Excogitation "Were it best to hint
Or boldly boast 'She loves me,—Araminte'?"

XXXII.

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight
Almost, so close to eyes; then, quick on flash,
Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright
Where René sat a-rhyming: with huge crash

Of marble into atoms infinite—
Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash
The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place:
One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

XXXIII.

So, when the horrible confusion loosed
Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,
Seeing and hearing by degrees induced
Conviction what he felt was life, not death—
His fluttered faculties came back to roost
One after one, as fowls do: ay, beneath,
About his very feet there, lay in dust
Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

XXXIV.

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing
But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,
A ducal crown—which meant "Now Duke: Next,
King"?
Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes
Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling
Prostrates a giant; so can pulverize
Marble pretension—how much more, make moult
A peacock-prince his plume—God's thunderbolt.

XXXV.

That was enough for René, that first fact
Thus flashed into him. Up he looked: all blue
And bright the sky above; earth firm, compact
Beneath his footing, lay apparent too;
Opposite stood the pillar: nothing lacked
There, but the Duke's crown: see, its fragments strew
The earth,—about his feet lie atoms fine
Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line!

XXXVI.

So, for the moment, all the universe
Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him,—
Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,
Of one and the same value,—to the brim
Flooded with truth for better or for worse,—
He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,
Keeping its place on table: not a dint
Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII.

And over the neat crowquill calligraph
His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox
Tramples a flower-bed in a garden,—laugh
You may!—so does not he, whose quick heart knocks

Audibly at his breast: an epitaph
On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,
He might be penning in a wild dismay,
Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII.

And what is it so terribly he pens,
Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,
Hearts, darts," and all his day's *divinior mens*
Judged necessary to a perfect style?
Little recks René, with a breast to cleanse,
Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile:
Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince
(Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt—the Prince.

XXXIX.

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not more
To life's end! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be?
Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before
Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,
Take its proud station there! Let France adore
No longer an illusive mock-sun—thee—
But keep her homage for Sol's self, about
To rise and put pretenders to the rout!

XL.

"What? France so God-abandoned that her root
Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,
Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot
Greenly as ever? Nature, though benign,
Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.
In store for such is punishment condign:
Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,
So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world!"

XLI.

Which penned—some forty lines to this effect—
Our René folds his paper, marches brave
Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,
Triumphant, an emancipated slave.
There stands the Prince. "How now? My Duke's
crown wrecked?
What may this mean?" The answer René gave
Was—handing him the verses, with the due
Incline of body: "Sir, God's word to you!"

XLII.

The Prince read, paled, was silent; all around,
The courtier-company, to whom he passed

The paper, read, in equal silence bound.
René grew also by degrees aghast
At his own fit of courage—palely found
Way of retreat from that pale presence: classed
Once more among the cony-kind. "Oh, son,
It is a feeble folk!" saith Solomon.

XLIII.

Vainly he apprehended evil: since,
When, at the year's end, even as foretold,
Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince
Of that long-craved mere visionary gold,
'T was no fit time for envy to evince
Malice, be sure! The timidest grew bold:
Of all that courtier-company not one
But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV.

And all sorts and conditions that stood by
At René's burning moment, bright escape
Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.
Which witness took the customary shape
Of verse; a score of poets in full cry
Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,
Soon Paris caught the infection; gaining strength,
How could it fail to reach the Court at length?

XLV.

"O poet!" smiled King Louis, "and besides,
O prophet! Sure, by miracle announced,
My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides
Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be trounced
For irreligion: since the fool derides
Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced
Exactly on the moment I should lift
Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, 'God's gift!'

XLVI.

"So call the boy! and call this bard and seer
By a new title! him I raise to rank
Of 'Royal Poet:' poet without peer!
Whose fellows only have themselves to thank
If humbly they must follow in the rear
My René. He 's the master: they must clank
Their chains of song, confessed his slaves; for why?
They poetize, while he can prophesy!"

XLVII.

So said, so done; our René rose august,
"The Royal Poet;" straightway put in type
His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just
Procedure) added,—now that time was ripe

For proving friends did well his word to trust,—
Those attestations, tuned to lyre or pipe,
Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell
The Dauphin's birth: friends trusted, and did well.

XLVIII.

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,
Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed
The portrait to his book: a crown of bay
Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed;
And Latin verses, lovely in their way,
Described him as "the biforked hill betwixt:
Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,
Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump."

XLIX.

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus long
—The red fire? That 's the reason must excuse
My letting flicker René's prophet-song
No longer; for its pertinacious hues
Must fade before its fellow joins the throng
Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues
To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,
Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks!

L.

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,
Fury of favour, Royal Poetship,
Prophetship, book, verse, picture—thereof came
—Nothing! That 's why I would not let outstrip
Red his green rival flamelet: just the same
Ending in smoke waits both! In vain we rip
The past, no further faintest trace remains
Of René to reward our pious pains.

LI.

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed
At Croisic. "Who may be this glorified
Mortal unheard-of hitherto?" amazed
That person asked the owner by his side,
Who proved as ignorant. The question raised
Provoked inquiry; key by key was tried
On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew
The wards at one key's touch, which key was—Who?

LII.

The other famous poet! Wait thy turn.
Thou green, our red's competitor! Enough
Just now to note 't was he that itched to learn
(A hundred years ago) how fate could puff

Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn
To suds so big a bubble in some huff:
Since green too found red's portrait,—having heard
Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII.

And he with zeal addressed him to the task
Of hunting out, by all and any means,
—Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask
Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens
And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask!
Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens
The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips
Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV.

After a vast expenditure of pains,
Our second poet found the prize he sought:
Urged in his search by something that restrains
From undue triumph famed ones who have fought,
Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains:
Something that tells such—dear is triumph bought
If it means only basking in the midst
Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV.

For, what did searching find at last but this?
Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem
To think I heard one old De Chevaye is
Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam
Of light from out the dark proved not amiss
To track, by correspondence on the theme;
And soon the twilight broadened into day,
For thus to question answered De Chevaye.

LVI.

"True it is, I did once possess the works
You want account of—works—to call them so,—
Comprised in one small book: the volume lurks
(Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)
'Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks
Still to remember, because long ago
That and my other rare shelf-occupants
Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII.

"Yet of that book one strange particular
Still stays in mind with me"—and thereupon
Followed the story. "Few the poems are;
The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,

And sundry witnesses from near and far
That here at least was prophesying done
By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,
Before the thing he prophesied about."

LVIII.

That's all he knew, and all the poet learned,
And all that you and I are like to hear
Of René; since not only book is burned
But memory extinguished,—nay, I fear,
Portrait is gone too: nowhere I discerned
A trace of it at Croisic. "Must a tear
Needs fall for that?" you smile. "How fortune fares
With such a mediocrity, who cares?"

LIX.

Well, I care—intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt
In after-life, who bore the burden grave
Of certainly believing God had dealt
For once directly with him: did not rave
—A maniac, did not find his reason melt
—An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX.

How many problems that one fact would solve!
An ordinary soul, no more, no less,
About whose life earth's common sights revolve,
On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,
This fact—God tasks him, and will not absolve
Task's negligent performer! Can you guess
How such a soul,—the task performed to point,—
Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint?

LXI.

Does he stand stock-like henceforth? or proceed
Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,
Down-trampling vulgar hindrance?—as the reed
Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind will
Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it speed
Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil
Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice
Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice

LXII.

I think no such direct plain truth consists
With actual sense and thought and what they take
To be the solid walls of life: mere mists—
How such would, at that truth's first piercing, break

Into the nullity they are!—slight lists
Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake
Of some mock-mistress, mimic war: laid low
At trumpet-blast, there 's shown the world, one foe!

LXIII.

No, we must play the pageant out, observe
The tourney-regulations, and regard
Success—to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,
Failure—to break no bones yet fall on sward;
Must prove we have—not courage? well then,—nerve!
And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award—
Be warranted as promising to wield
Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV.

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps
Which tell us counterfeited truths—these same
Are—sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?
—Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim
That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,
To fall effectless from the soul it came
As if to fix its own, but simply smote
And startled to vague beauty more remote?

LXV.

So do we gain enough—yet not too much—
Acquaintance with that outer element
Wherein there 's operation (call it such !)
Quite of another kind than we the pent
On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch
Lights up at the least chink : let roof be rent—
How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,
Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm !

LXVI.

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick
Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare
Into oblivion was impolitic ?
No doubt his soul became at once aware
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick
Is poor employment : human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII.

There 's our first famous poet. Step thou forth
Second consummate songster ! See, the tongue
Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth
In yellow, purple mixed its green among,

No pure and simple resin from the North,
But composite with virtues that belong
To Southern culture! Love not more than hate
Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII.

Prepare to witness a combustion rich
And riotously splendid, far beyond
Poor René's lambent little streamer which
Only played candle to a Court grown fond
By baby-birth: this soared to such a pitch,
Alternately such colours doffed and donned,
That when I say it dazzled Paris—please
Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees!

LXIX.

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,
Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,
Whose birth that century ended which began
By similar bestowment on our earth
Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan
The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth—
Not Paris in its plenitude—suffice
To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX.

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein
Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirts:
In verses of society had lain
His talent chiefly; but the Muse asserts
Privilege most by treating with disdain
Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts
Spasmodically forth. Have people time
And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme?

LXXI.

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch
Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell
Of admiration: welded lines with clinch
Of ending word and word, to every belle
In Croisic's bounds; these, brisk as any finch,
He twittered till his fame had reached as well
Guérande as Batz; but there fame stopped, for—curse
On fortune—outside lay the universe!

LXXII.

That 's Paris. Well,—why not break bounds, and send
Song onward till it echo at the gates
Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,
And end too, seeing that success there sates

The soul which hungers most for fame? Why spend
A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's
Decree, there happens to be just the prize
Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize?

LXXIII.

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self
Proposes to what bard shall best indite
A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,
The Art of Navigation, steered aright,
Has, in our last king's reign,—the lucky elf,—
Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,
And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees
The subject's crowd of capabilities!

LXXIV.

Neptune and Amphitrité! Thetis, who
Is either Tethys or as good—both tag!
Triton can shove along a vessel too:
It 's Virgil! Then the winds that blow or lag,—
De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois! Toulouse blew
Longest, we reckon: he must puff the flag
To fullest outflare; while our lacking nymph
Be Anne of Austria, Regent o'er the lymph

LXXV.

Promised, performed! Since *irritabilis gens*
Holds of the feverish impotence that strives
To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's
Scratching itself on paper; placid lives,
Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens:*
Bees brood above the honey in their hives;
Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl,—
Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul!

LXXVI.

To Paris with the product! This despatched,
One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure
Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched
Away perforce the itch that knows no cure
But daily paper-friction: more than matched
His first feat by a second—tribute pure
And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice
Should peal with one accord "Be Paul our choice!"

LXXVII.

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane
And sound Tribunal, delegates august
Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train—
Whom every poetaster tries to thrust

From where, high-throned, they dominate the Seine:
Fruitless endeavour,—fail it shall and must!
Whereof in witness have not one and all
The Forty voices pealed "Our Choice be Paul"?

LXXVIII.

Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack
For human expectation! Scarcely ink
Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back
Rejected, shamed! Some other poet's clink
"Thetis and Tethys" had seduced the pack
Of pedants to declare perfection's pink
A singularly poor production. "Whew!
The Forty are stark fools, I always knew."

LXXIX.

First fury over (for Paul's race—to-wit,
Brain-vibrios—wriggle clear of protoplasm
Into minute life that 's one fury-fit),
"These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm
Comports with what should counterbalance it—
Some knowledge of the world! No doubt, orgasm
Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands
Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands!

LXXX.

"Verse must be cared for at this early stage,
Handled, nay dandled even. I should play
Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,
I meekly let these dotards frown away
My bantling from the rightful heritage
Of smiles and kisses! Let the public say
If it be worthy praises or rebukes,
My poem, from these Forty old perukes!"

LXXXI.

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace
With no less than the Chevalier La Roque,—
Eminent in those days for pride of place,
Seeing he had it in his power to block
The way or smooth the road to all the race
Of literators trudging up to knock
At Fame's exalted temple-door—for why?
He edited the Paris "Mercury":—

LXXXII.

By this friend's help the Chevalier receives
Paul's poem, prefaced by the due appeal
To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves
A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal

With case so customary—turns the leaves,
Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal—
Then brightens up the critic's brow deep-lined.
"The thing may be so cleverly declined!"

LXXXIII.

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,
Dip and indite! "Sir, gratitude immense
For this true draught from the Pierian rill!
Our Academic clodpoles must be dense
Indeed to stand unirrigated still.
No less, we critics dare not give offence
To grandees like the Forty: while we mock
We grin and bear. So, here's your piece! La Roque.

LXXXIV.

"There now!" cries Paul: "the fellow can't avoid
Confessing that my piece deserves the palm;
And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed
By every scribbler he permits embalm
His crambo in the Journal's corner! Cloyed
With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm
Be caused by verse like mine: though that's no cause
For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV.

"Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon?
First let him fear *me!* Change smooth speech to rough!
I 'll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon
Who is the foe to dread: insist enough
On my own merits till, as clear as noon,
He sees I am no man to take rebuff
As patiently as scribblers may and must!
Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust!"

LXXXVI.

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings
Its challenge in the critic's face. Alack!
Our bard mistakes his man! The gauntlet rings
On brazen visor proof against attack.
Prompt from his editorial throne up springs
The insulted magnate, and his mace falls, thwack,
On Paul's devoted brainpan,—quite away
From common courtesies of fencing-play!

LXXXVII.

"Sir, will you have the truth? This piece of yours
Is simply execrable past belief.
I shrank from saying so; but, since nought cures
Conceit but truth, truth 's at your service! Brief,

just so long as 'The Mercury' endures,
So long are you excluded by its Chief
From corner, nay, from cranny! Play the cock
O' the roost, henceforth, at Croisic!" wrote La Roque.

LXXXVIII.

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red
Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme
Was merely foolish, faulty in the head
Not heart of him: conceit's a venial crime.
"Oh by no means malicious!" cousins said:
Fussily feeble,—harmless all the time,
Piddling at so-called satire—well-advised,
He held in most awe whom he satirized.

LXXXIX.

Accordingly his kith and kin—removed
From emulation of the poet's gift
By power and will—these rather liked, nay, loved
The man who gave his family a lift
Out of the Croisic level; "disapproved
Satire so trenchant." Thus our poet sniffed
Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock
"The Mercury's" box of ointment was La Roque.

XC.

But when Paul's visage grew from red to white,
And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell
Of who was to be kicked,—"And serve him right"—
A gay voice interposed—"did kicking well
Answer the purpose! Only—if I might
Suggest as much—a far more potent spell
Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,
Women are ready at resource, you know!

XCI.

"Talent should minister to genius! Good:
The proper and superior smile returns.
Hear me with patience! Have you understood
The only method whereby genius earns
Fit guerdon nowadays? In knightly mood
You entered lists with visor up; one learns
Too late that, had you mounted Roland's crest,
'Room!' they had roared—La Roque with all the rest!

XCII.

"Why did you first of all transmit your piece
To those same priggish Forty unprepared
Whether to rank you with the swans or geese
By friendly intervention? If they dared

Count you a cackler,—wonders never cease!
I think it still more wondrous that you bared
Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise
Were gained by simple fighting nowadays!

XCIII.

"Your next step showed a touch of the true means
Whereby desert is crowned: not force but wile
Came to the rescue. 'Get behind the scenes!'
Your friend advised: he writes, sets forth your style
And title, to such purpose intervenes
That you get velvet-compliment three-pile;
And, though 'The Mercury' said 'nay,' nor stock
Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

XCIV.

"Why must you needs revert to the high hand,
Imperative procedure—what you call
'Taking on merit your exclusive stand'?
Stand, with a vengeance! Soon you went to wall,
You and your merit! Only fools command
When folk are free to disobey them, Paul!
You 've learnt your lesson, found out what 's o'clock,
By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

XCV.

"Now let me counsel! Lay this piece on shelf
—Masterpiece though it be! From out your desk
Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque
Presiding o'er the Navy! I myself
Hand-write what 's legible yet picturesque;
I 'll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts La Roque!

XCVI.

"Deïdamia he—Achilles thou!
Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt!
My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow
In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped
I see the walls which stand so stoutly now!
I see the toils about the game entrapped
By honest cunning! Chains of lady's-smock,
Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque!"

XCVII.

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch
That laughed above Paul's shoulder as it heaved
With the indignant heart?—bade steal a march
And not continue charging? Who conceived

This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch
On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,
From arm-chair moodiness to escritoire
Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir?

XCVIII.

Who but Paul's sister! named of course like him
"Desforges"; but, mark you, in those days a queer
Custom obtained,—who knows whence grew the whim?—
That people could not read their title clear
To reverence till their own true names, made dim
By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,
Replaced by brand-new bright ones: Arouet,
For instance, grew Voltaire; Desforges—Malcrais.

XCIX.

"Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne"—because
The family possessed at Brederac
A vineyard,– few grapes, many hips-and-haws,—
Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back
Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,
So did her sprightly nature nowise lack
Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,
In "Malcrais de la Vigne"—more short, "Malcrais."

C.

Out from Paul's escritoire behold escape
The hoarded treasure! verse falls thick and fast,
Sonnets and songs of every size and shape.
The lady ponders on her prize; at last
Selects one which—Oh angel and yet ape!—
Her malice thinks is probably surpassed
In badness by no fellow of the flock,
Copies it fair, and "Now for my La Roque!"

CI.

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,
The soft petitionary letter. "Grant
A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt
She soar her little circuit, habitant
Of an old manor; buried in which crypt,
How can the youthful châtelaine but pant
For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*
Appointed 'Mercury's' Editor, La Roque?"

CII.

'T was an epistle that might move the Turk!
More certainly it moved our middle-aged
Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,
Raked the old ashes up and disengaged

The sparks of gallantry which always lurk
Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged
In no degree by compliments on style;
Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?

CIII.

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place
Of honour in the gratified Gazette,
With due acknowledgment of power and grace;
Prognostication, too, that higher yet
The Breton Muse will soar: fresh youth, high race,
Beauty and wealth have amicably met
That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair
Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

CIV.

"There!" cried the lively lady. "Who was right—
You in the dumps, or I the merry maid
Who know a trick or two can baffle spite
Tenfold the force of this old fool's? Afraid
Of Editor La Roque? But come! next flight
Shall outsoar—Deshoulières alone? My blade,
Sappho herself shall you confess outstript!
Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript!"

CV.

And so, once well a-foot, advanced the game:
More and more verses, corresponding gush
On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim
Rose to the pitch of uproar. "Sappho? Tush!
Sure 'Malcrais on her Parrot' puts to shame
Deshoulières' pastoral, clay not worth a rush
Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock,
Unearthed in Brittany,—nay, ask La Roque!"

CVI.

Such was the Paris tribute. "Yes," you sneer,
"Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage
Resist contagious folly, never fear!"
Do they? Permit me to detach one page
From the huge Album which from far and near
Poetic praises blackened in a rage
Of rapture! and that page shall be—who stares
Confounded now, I ask you?—just Voltaire's!

CVII.

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed
To death Imposture through the armour-joints!
How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed
Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out? Fate appoints

That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed
Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,
Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,
And dismalest of tumbles proved—Voltaire's!

CVIII.

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith
"Henri" in verse and "Charles" in prose he sent
To do her suit and service! Here's the pith
Of half a dozen stanzas—stones which went
To build that simulated monolith—
Sham love in due degree with homage blent
As sham—which in the vast of volumes scares
The traveller still: "That stucco-heap—Voltaire's?"

CIX.

"Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown
The wilds to startle Paris that's one ear!
Thou who such strange capacity hast shown
For joining all that's grand with all that's dear,
Knowledge with power to please—Deshoulières grown
Learned as Dacier in thy person! mere
Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine
I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine!

CX.

"Charles was my taskwork only; Henri trod
My hero erst; and now, my heroine—she
Shall be thyself! True—is it true, great God?
Certainly love henceforward must not be!
Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail—how odd!—
Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me!
There 's no replacing love with these, alas!
Yet all I can I do to prove no ass.

CXI.

"I labour to amuse my freedom; but
Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,
And—borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut!—
Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,
Soon should I see myself in prison shut
With all imaginable pleasure." Reach
The washhand-basin for admirers! There 's
A stomach-moving tribute—and Voltaire's!

CXII.

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,
Adulatory flourish, not worth frown!
What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux?
These in their Dictionary have her down

Under the heading "Author": "Malcrais, too,
Is 'Author' of much verse that claims renown."
While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why proceed?
Enough of this—something too much, indeed!

CXIII.

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left
Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds
Of figurative passion; hilt and heft,
Plunged his huge downright love through what surrounds
The literary female bosom; reft
Away its veil of coy reserve with "Zounds!
I love thee, Breton Beauty! All 's no use!
Body and soul I love,—the big word 's loose!"

CXIV.

He's greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
Nearest. Attend the solemn word I quote,
O Paul! *There's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*
Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!
Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!
Better and truer verse none ever wrote
(Despite the antique outstretched *a-i-on*)
Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

CXV.

Flat on his face, La Roque, and,—pressed to heart
His dexter hand,—Voltaire with bended knee!
Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart
Leaned over him his sister. "Well!" smirks he,
And "Well?" she answers, smiling—woman's art
To let a man's own mouth, not hers, decree
What shall be next move which decides the game:
Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame.

CXVI.

"Well!" this time forth affirmatively comes
With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through teeth
Close clenched o'er satisfaction, as the gums
Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath
Palate by lubricating tongue: "Well! crumbs
Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death
Likely from famine at Fame's feast! 't is clear
I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

CXVII.

"La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise
Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop!
I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men's eyes
My proper manly garb and mount a-top

The pedestal that waits me, take the prize
Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop
To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,
Then, following, licked his heels: exactly so!

CXVIII.

"I like the prospect—their astonishment,
Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,
Mixed motives; how I see the brows quick bent!
'What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about
This change of estimation? Phœbus sent
His shafts as from Diana?' Critic pout
Turns courtier smile: 'Lo, him we took for her!
Pleasant mistake! You bear no malice, sir?'

CXIX.

"Eh, my Diana?" But Diana kept
Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp
Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept
Paul's very thoughts ere they had time to warp
From earnest into sport the words they leapt
To life with—changed as when maltreated harp
Renders in tinkle what some player-prig
Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX.

"What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,
My lessons end in loss?" at length fall slow
The pitying syllables, her lips allay
The satire of by keeping in full flow,
Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play:
"Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know
And altogether estimate applause
As just so many asinine hee-haws?

CXXI.

"I thought to show you". . . "Show me," Paul in broke
"My poetry is rubbish, and the world
That rings with my renown a sorry joke!
What fairer test of worth than that, form furled,
I entered the arena? Yet you croak
Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurled
The dart and struck the Python! What, he crawls
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's?

CXXII.

"Nay, 't is no laughing matter though absurd
If there 's an end of honesty on earth!
La Roque sends letters, lying every word!
Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth

To the remotest age! Rousseau 's the third
Who, driven to despair amid such dearth
Of people that want praising, finds no one
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton!

CXXIII.

"Somebody says—if a man writes at all
It is to show the writer's kith and kin
He was unjustly thought a natural;
And truly, sister, I have yet to win
Your favourable word, it seems, for Paul
Whose poetry you count not worth a pin
Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,
Rousseaus and suchlike: let them quack, who cares?"

CXXIV.

"—To Paris with you, Paul! Not one word's waste
Further: my scrupulosity was vain!
Go triumph! Be my foolish fears effaced
From memory's record! Go, to come again
With glory crowned,—by sister re-embraced,
Cured of that strange delusion of her brain
Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats
On male limbs mostly when in petticoats!"

CXXV.

So laughed her last word, with the little touch
Of malice proper to the outraged pride
Of any artist in a work too much
Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried
The opposite procedure! Cast your crutch
Away, no longer crippled, nor divide
The credit of your march to the World's Fair
With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there!"

CXXVI.

Crippled, forsooth! what courser sprightlier pranced
Paris-ward than did Paul? Nay, dreams lent wings:
He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.
Dreams? wide-awake realities: no things
Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced
The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings
Crowned by Apollo—not to say with queens
Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII.

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before
The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc
Announces there 's a giant at the door.
"Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."

"Lackey! Malcrais,—mind, no word less nor more!—
Desires his presence. I've unearthed the brock:
Now, to transfix him!" There stands Paul erect,
Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII.

A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!
Can it be that my heart attains at last
Its longing? that you stand, the very same
As in my visions? . . . Ha! hey, how?" aghast
Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy 's to blame!
You merely are the messenger! Too fast
My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh!
Well, sir, the lady's substitute is—who?"

CXXIX.

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands!
Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,
Though nor Malcrais nor any mistress stands
To meet your ardour! So, you don't divine
Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's
Whole length and breadth? Just he whereof no line
Had ever leave to blot your Journal—eh?
Paul Desforges Maillard—otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXX.

And there the two stood, stare confronting smirk,
Awhile uncertain which should yield the *pas*.
In vain the Chevalier beat brain for quirk
To help in this conjuncture; at length "Bah!
Boh! Since I've made myself a fool, why shirk
The punishment of folly? Ha, ha, ha,
Let me return your handshake!" Comic sock
For tragic buskin prompt thus changed La Roque.

CXXXI.

"I 'm nobody—a wren-like journalist;
You 've flown at higher game and winged your bird,
The golden eagle! That 's the grand acquist!
Voltaire's sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred
Prettily round your feet; but if she missed
Priority of stroking, soon were stirred
The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire! away,
Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXXII.

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,
The two begin their journey. Need I say,
La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,
Had a long standing little debt to pay,

And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare
Occasion for its due discharge? So, gay
And grenadier-like, marching to assault,
They reach the enemy's abode, there halt.

CXXXIII.

"I 'll be announcer!" quoth La Roque: "I know,
Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,
How to procure an audience! He 's not slow
To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire! Discard
The petticoats too soon,—you 'll never show
Your *haut-de-chausses* and all they 've made or marred
In your true person. Here 's his servant. Pray,
Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais?"

CXXXIV.

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,
The man of self-respect,—more great man he!
And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,
And decorated to the fit degree
His person; 't was enough to bear the stress
Of battle in the field, without, when free
From outside foes, inviting friends' attack
By—sword in hand? No,—ill-made coat on back!

CXXXV.

And, since the announcement of his visitor
Surprised him at his toilet,—never glass
Had such solicitation! "Black, now—or
Brown be the killing wig to wear? Alas,
Where 's the rouge gone, this cheek were better for
A tender touch of? Melted to a mass,
All my pomatum! There 's at all events
A devil—for he 's got among my scents!"

CXXXVI.

So, "barbered ten times o'er," as Antony
Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last
Voltaire proceed to the fair presence: high
In colour, proud in port, as if a blast
Of trumpet bade the world "Take note! draws nigh
To Beauty, Power! Behold the Iconoclast,
The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod
Of iron for imposture! Ah my God!"

CXXXVII.

For there stands smirking Paul, and—what lights fierce
The situation as with sulphur flash—
There grinning stands La Roque! No carte-and-tierce
Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash

From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce
That armour against which so idly clash
The swords of priests and pedants! Victors there,
Two smirk and grin who have befooled—Voltaire!

CXXXVIII.

A moment's horror; then quick turn-about
On high-heeled shoe,—flurry of ruffles, flounce
Of wig-ties and of coat-tails,—and so out
Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes—bounce—
Voltaire in tragic exit! vows, no doubt,
Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce
Either, in point of fact? His anger's flash
Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX.

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh
To heart's content,—the joke defunct at once,
Dead in the birth, you see,—its epitaph
Was sober earnest. "Well, sir, for the nonce,
You 've gained the laurel; never hope to graff
A second sprig of triumph there! Ensconce
Yourself again at Croisic: let it be
Enough you mastered both Voltaire and—me!

CXL.

"Don't linger here in Paris to parade
Your victory, and have the very boys
Point at you! 'There 's the little mouse which made
Believe those two big lions that its noise,
Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed
Intelligence that—portent which destroys
All courage in the lion's heart, with horn
That 's fable—there lay couched the unicorn!'

CXLI.

"Beware us, now we 've found who fooled us! Quick
To cover! 'In proportion to men's fright,
Expect their fright's revenge!' quoth politic
Old Macchiavelli. As for me,—all 's right:
I 'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick
The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite!
So, keep your counsel, I advise! Adieu!
Good journey! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was—you!"

CXLII.

"—Yes, I 'm Malcrais, and somebody beside,
You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed
Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale

Mortified poet. "Let their worst be tried,
I'm their match henceforth—very man and male!
Don't talk to me of knocking-under! man
And male must end what petticoats began!

CXLIII.

"How woman-like it is to apprehend
The world will eat its words! why, words transfixed
To stone, they stare at you in print,—at end,
Each writer's style and title! Choose betwixt
Fool and knave for his name, who should intend
To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed
With prospect of advantage! What is writ
Is writ: they 've praised me, there 's an end of it.

CXLIV.

"No, Dear, allow me! I shall print these same
Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.
Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame
What they—praised simply?—placed on pedestals,
Each piece a statue in the House of Fame!
Fast will they stand there, though their presence galls
The envious crew: such show their teeth, perhaps
And snarl, but never bite! I know the chaps!"

CXLV.

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded! Pace
Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,
Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race
Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats
Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,
The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,
One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,
That needle under, stream with weedy rags!

CXLVI.

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,
Rude heritage but recognized domain,
Do as two here are doing: make hearth crack
With logs until thy chimney roar again
Jolly with fire-glow! Let its angle lack
No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain
To do a sister's office and laugh smooth
Thy corrugated brow—that scowls forsooth!

CXLVII.

Wherefore? Who does not know how these La Roques,
Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame,
Prove black white, white black, play at paradox
And, when they seem to lose it, win the game?

Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,
His fellow in rascality, call "fame!"
Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it, — quack, quack quack!
Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII.

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!
A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care
As much for what to-day they clap or hiss
As for the fashion of the wigs they wear,
Then wonder at. There 's fame which, bale or bliss,—
Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire
Or not-so-great La Roque,— is taken back
By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX.

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!
No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the maid,
Thenceforth for ever! One or two, I see,
Stuck by their poet: who the longest stayed
Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he
Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid
A rhyming tribute "After death, survive—
He hoped he should; and died while yet alive!"

CL.

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held
His peace and died in silent good old age.
Him it was, curiosity impelled
To seek if there were extant still some page
Of his great predecessor, rat who belled
The cat once, and would never deign engage
In after-combat with mere mice,—saved from
More sonnetteering,—René Gentilhomme.

CLI.

Paul's story furnished forth that famous play
Of Piron's "Métromanie": there you 'll find
He 's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais
Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!
As for Voltaire, he 's Damis. Good and gay
The plot and dialogue, and all 's designed
To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the laugh
Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII.

But truth, truth, that 's the gold! and all the good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret

Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII.

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt
Of fitful flame,—twin births of our grey brand
That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,
As sparkles want but fuel to expand
Into a conflagration no mere squirt
Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic strand,
Had Fortune pleased posterity to chowse,
Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV.

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?
But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!
How often frustrate they of fame's award
Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew
Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled and marred
And forced to put about the First-rate! True,
Such tacks but for a time: still—small-craft ride
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the tide!

CLV.

Dear, shall I tell you? There 's a simple test
Would serve, when people take on them to weigh
The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)
"What quality preponderating may
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife
By asking "Which one led a happy life?"

CLVI.

If one did, over his antagonist
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed
Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,
Mastered by his own means of might,—acquist
Of necessary sorrows,—he prevailed,
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII.

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sight—
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,

One dance of rogues and idiots! Not, to deal
More with things lovely? What provoked the spite
Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need
Of other nutriment than strife and greed!

CLVIII.

Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
Of all comprised within our actual scope
Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
Henceforward among groundlings? That 's offence
Just as indubitably: stars abound
O'erhead, but then—what flowers make glad the ground!

CLIX.

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the steer
Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
Despair: but ever mid the whirling fear,
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!

CLX.

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,
And save my breath for better purpose. White
From grey our log has burned to: just one blink
That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite
The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink
Punish who sealed so deep into the night
Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long,—
Here pleads a live pretender: right your wrong!

I.

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
—Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

II.

Anyhow there 's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting !)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

III.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre ;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing : I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that 's behind.

IV.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
—Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss : such ears
Had old judges, it appears !

V.

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile "In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!"

VI.

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,—who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?—it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What "cicada"? Pooh!)
—Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music—flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

VIII.

So that when (ah joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

IX.

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,—indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

X.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
"Take the prize—a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!"

XI.

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That 's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

XII.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
—Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

XIII.

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

XIV.

That 's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that 's—Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

XV.

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue 's built,
Tell the gazer "'T was a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose tilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

XVI.

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,—
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,—one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,—

XVII.

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

XVIII.

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet? All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

END OF THE FOURTEENTH VOLUME.

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